

*Horror in Culture & Entertainment*

# RUE-MORGUE

20 BITTERSWEET  
YEARS OF

## The CROW

CAST AND CREW ON  
THE LEGACY OF THE  
GOTHIC REVENGE TALE

ISSUE 147 AUGUST 2014 CAN/US \$3.95



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LIFE HAUNTED OBJECTS

PLUS:

THE LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE • THE KING IN YELLOW • YEAR'S BEST WEIRD FICTION • DEVIL'S MILE



## 16 A TERRIBLE SADNESS

It launched the career of director Alex Proyas and ended the life of star Brandon Lee. Twenty years later, cast and crew of *The Crow* detail the bittersweet legacy of the gothic revenge tale. **PLUS:** A brief look at 25 years of *The Crow* in comic books, and Jeff Most describes how he put together one of the most famous soundtracks of the '90s.

by COLIN McCracken

## 24 THE REVENGER'S SONG

With a special edition out this month, we go behind the scenes of Brian De Palma's *Phantom of the Paradise* to relive the 40-year-old horror-musical that went from commercial flop to cult favourite.

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## AMERICAN 30-GOTHIC

*Motel Hell* director Kevin Connor reveals the secret ingredients in his beloved backwoods slasher just in time for its Blu-ray premiere.

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# NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND



"My view of the world is ironic, bitter, acid..."

Judging by that interview quote I found online, Brian De Palma has a permanent case of the Death Metal Mondays. That spite permeates every frame of *Phantom of the Paradise* – a product of downbeat '70s cinema that drips with bile for the music industry. There's no other film that so creatively skewers the soulless, shallow world of prefab bands, shady record labels and backstabbing businessmen.

Irony in the arts – and the art of irony – used to be a defense against the crass, faux-sincerity of the mainstream (for example, ridiculing the interchangeable pop groups in *Phantom*), because nothing fends off plastic sentiment like jaded snark, right? De Palma was trying to keep it real in a world full of fakers.

But now culture seems defined by ironic distance. It's much easier and safer to sit behind a computer screen and mock/be skeptical of everything, letting the world know that you're impervious to the affect of art and anything that else that might suggest naïveté – something we're reminded of in online comments section.

*Salon* recently ran an article titled "David Foster Wallace was right: Irony is ruining our culture," which discusses this current state of affairs. Wallace, who hanged himself in 2008 after battling depression, was a Pulitzer Prize-nominated essayist, novelist, short story writer and English professor, who, in a 1993 essay for *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, wrote, "I want to convince you that irony, poker-faced silence, and fear of ridicule are distinctive of those features of contemporary U.S. culture. ... I'm going to argue that irony and ridicule are entertaining and effective, and that at the same time they are agents of a great despair and stasis in U.S. culture."

The *Salon* article demonstrates just how prophetic Foster was in terms of where culture has gone. I see that "poker-faced silence" and "fear of ridicule" every day on online and sometimes it's so pointlessly derisive (and that's key: De Palma, for example, was making a point and not just posturing) that I really do feel a sense of despair sometimes. The result is that distance, borne of fear to express genuine affection for something that might make you a target. So we retreat into saving our passionate celebrations for those things that are enshrined, the films/books/comics/TV shows/video games/etc. that we've collectively decided are unimpeachable. Everything else is discussed through a pane of bellicose-coloured glass or prefaced with the protection spell of "I know it's lame, but..." It's never been tougher to walk through the locker room of the world with naked sentiment because everyone's winding up a towel.

The horror genre has long been a target because of its adherence to formulas, vulnerability from low budgets, and the fact that its content is intended to *genuinely* scare us. Horror hosts, *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, the *Scary Movie* franchise, etc. playfully deal in irony, pointing out painful clichés and other shortcomings, which in turn kill them off and encourage creators to move in new directions. So ironic ridicule certainly has its place, but it's a terrible default mode in which to engage the world.

If you're reading this, you probably love horror *because* it cuts through your armour and makes you feel. You might enjoy playful irony sometimes (say, in films like the *Piranha* remake or the *Feast* movies) but your heart desires intimacy with something that throws your world off-kilter and can't be dismissed with some clever scorn. Us dedicated fans don't want to feel above the horror culture we consume; we want it to consume us.

I remember feeling that way about *The Crow*. I have a vivid memory, in fact, of walking out of the theatre in the midst of a downtown downpour that darkened the gray concrete and made it feel like the movie had followed me into the streets. Granted, I can't argue against the fact that it's a simplistic revenge tale catering to a teenage mindset (it seemed so deep back then), and those who criticize its pro-violence message are justified. But I still love the film, not only for its pounding alt-rock soundtrack, amazing production design, committed performances (especially from Lee and Wincott) and deft direction, but because I also see it as an allegory about defeating irony.

The love between the characters of Eric Draven and his fiancée is portrayed as something genuine in a grotesquely cynical world, where bad guys mock and destroy, and everyone else sits by and lets it happen, trying not to become a victim in a place with a crime rate that rivals *Grand Theft Auto*. When the score is finally settled, though, *The Crow* gives his young friend Sarah hope for the next generation that there's a silver lining ("It can't rain all the time," right?). It's simple and sentimental and I enjoy being in its world for 100 minutes. The darkness, violence and horror dressing – and, admittedly, the real-life drama of Lee's on set death – creates in *The Crow* a unique gothic-noir world that still holds up. It's a beautiful film that still stirs something inside me, beyond nostalgia. At heart I'm a realist, but I want my reality to resist the crippling grip of cultural irony. I'd like to see more works like it that wear their heart on their black sleeve without apology.

And if that sounds uncool, well, there's plenty of bitter acid around to fill your cup.

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Horror is Culture & Entertainment

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Design by Andrew Wright

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# POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



**THANKS FOR THE** excellent article on *Curtains* [RM#146], which brought back happy memories of my misspent VHS days whilst growing up in grey old Essex in the '80s. What an issue! Second only to the fantastic piece on *Rituals* a couple of years back. You are a consistently great magazine!

**SIMON MARTIN – WOKINGHAM, UNITED KINGDOM**

**THANK YOU @RUEMORGUE** for bringing that old lady back into my head and my dreams! [*Curtains*, RM#146] I thought she had left for good! Shit.

**@JAMNLOKI, VIA TWITTER**

**I GOT MY** very first copy of *Rue Morgue* magazine in this month's Horror Block, can't wait to read it on my vacation.

**LIZ SCOTT, VIA FACEBOOK**



**FIRST TIME READING** @RueMorgue thanks to the team @HorrorBlock. I like what I see.

**@BLACKBIRD685, VIA TWITTER**

**SECRETS OF** the Cryptkeeper's Haunted House [RM#146] is real! I knew I couldn't have imagined it! I feel vindicated!

**@JPWENDEL, VIA TWITTER**

**BIG THANKS** to *Rue Morgue*'s Dave Alexander for the really awesome interview today! Got the opportunity to chat about horror art, some rad artists, and Dave's awesome "What if?" film art gallery "If They Came From Within" [for the upcoming poster documentary *Twenty-Four by Thirty-Six*].

**KEVIN BURKE, VIA FACEBOOK**

**@RUEMORGUE** Thank you for recognizing, respecting and caring about your gay readers! Very cool.

**DAVID GLEN RICE, VIA TWITTER**

**HORROR ISN'T ALWAYS** about the loud sound, the jump, the spilling shit on yourself. Sometimes it's about

strapping the imagination into a catapult, waiting for a storm, and cutting the rope. I love it all. I love the man losing an arm apiece to power-saw wielding twins as much as the shapely shadow in the corner of a sick grandmother's hospital room. I love a teenager exploding into worms, a lake that's alive, or something as quiet as the slanted handwriting of a will. I'll shake the steady hand at the same time I shake the unsteady hand. I'm in. I've signed up. I'm a lifer. Thing is, nobody cages the variety of horror with as much skill as *Rue Morgue*, the magazine I check the shelf for weekly, though I know it comes out once a month. While in Toronto, I got to do an interview with the brilliant Monica S. Kuebler (I was intimidated, she can probably hear me trembling on the tape), got to see the office, and really just got to be *around* it all. That was good enough for me. But to find my name and [Bird Box] on the RM#146 cover? Come on. That's enough to make this horror-adorer lose his shit. Encouraging enough to make me wanna be a horror host. Anybody wanna' be the Thing in the Box? I'll be Four-Trackula. Together we'll write *Rue Morgue* a song... but it better be a good one.

**JOSH MALERMAN, VIA FACEBOOK**

**WITH THE NETWORKS** filled with crime shows like *Hannibal*, *True Detective* and the fantastic fantasy *Game of Thrones*, it was initially exciting to get some good old-fashioned horror in the series *From Dusk Till Dawn* [RM#145]. After *Twilight* killed vampires surer than *Van Helsing*, I expected good things from such wonderful source material by Robert Rodriguez, but the show is more of the same. Unlike *Hannibal*, which finds new avenues to explore in a known franchise, *FDT* seems [to be] an extended ten-episode remake of the movie. The maniac brothers, the sexy vamp, Sex Machine, the hostages fighting with the baddies. Come on! Why bother when people can watch George Clooney in the original?

**MATTHEW WILSON – WOLVERHAMPTON**

**THANK YOU**, *Rue Morgue*, for the super sexy *WolfCop* centerfold! Seems my Burton Cummings pin-up has finally met its match.

**JESS LANDRY, VIA FACEBOOK**

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## EXPIRING MINDS...

ON RUE MORGUE'S FACEBOOK PAGE



What was the last thing in the genre you watched/read/heard that blew your mind?

*Pontypool* really reinvigorated my love for the genre. It actually creeped me out.

**JUSTIN CHARD**

When Rick shoots the little girl zombie in *The Walking Dead*. Up until then I didn't see many kids getting shot in the head in movies or TV.

**JUSTIN RISSMAN**

I'm still not right after seeing *Martyrs*. Four years ago.

**ANDIE GABOR**

Anything by Edward Lee. He literally blows my mind with how grotesque his work is. He's amazing.

**STACY DAVIS**

*A Field In England...* I'm still processing it...

**SABELLA HESS DZIABCZENKO**

John Ajvide Lindqvist's short story collection *Let the Old Dreams Die*.

**HANNAH JOY GAUTHIER**

*House of the Devil*. It actually made me say out loud, "Get the hell out of that house!"

**JASON FARWELL**

WE ENCOURAGE READERS TO SEND THEIR COMMENTS VIA MAIL OR EMAIL. LETTERS MAY BE EDITED FOR LENGTH AND/OR CONTENT. PLEASE SEND TO [INFO@RUE-MORGUE.COM](mailto:info@rue-morgue.com) OR:

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# Deadlines



NEWS HIGHLIGHTS — HORROR HAPPENINGS

## HORROR-THEMED WEDDING CAKES A BOOMING BUSINESS

UK cake artist Tracey Rothwell has parlayed her love of '80s horror into a thriving specialty baking service. The Lancashire-based baker has earned an enthusiastic following with her elaborate confections, many of which are inspired by such horror staples as *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Evil Dead*.

"My first horror cake was for my older brother," says the self-taught artist, whose pastries typically involve at least three days of labour. "When we were younger we would sit and watch *Nightmare on Elm Street* movies and he would draw Freddy gloves onto his bedroom wall, so that seemed a perfect choice for his 30th birthday cake. ... Other people started realizing that, yes, maybe they could have a horror birthday cake instead of the standard chocolate cake with a candle in it."

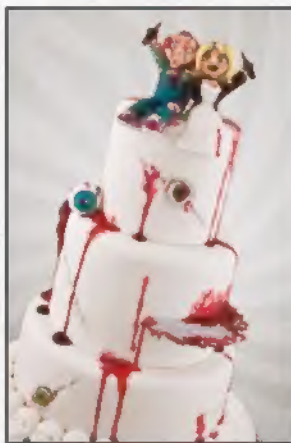
Rothwell, founder of Little Cherry Cake Company and its wicked alter ego, Black Cherry (blackcherrycakecompany.com), began her journey into the dark side of sugarcraft a few years ago, when she created a *Nightmare Before Christmas* cake for an "alternative wedding fair." When the event was cancelled, Rothwell hauled her cheerfully morbid creations to a more traditional wedding fair, where one patron asked if she had made the cakes for a funeral.

"I stood out like a sore thumb with my skulls among all the pretty birdcages, doves and white chair covers," the baker recalls. "I just take it all on the chin now. There are three types of people: the ones who can't see past white cakes with pillars and flowers, the people who get it but wouldn't order one, and then there are my cus-



The Black Cherry Cake Company's creations include the "Land of the Wed" apocalypse cake, and (inset) one based on *Bride of Chucky*.

tomers — the most badass awesome people on the planet."



Rothwell just might be onto something in that evaluation of her clients. Since that first, fateful Krueger cake, she has created wedding, birthday and other event cakes inspired by such classic and contemporary genre favourites as *Ghostbusters*, *Bride of Chucky* and *The Walking Dead*.

"One of my favourites was a zombie apocalypse cake," she notes. "I had been waiting for an order like this ever since I started decorating. Then it happened: the most awesome couple wanted a 'Land of the Wed' cake based on an old-style cinema. They basically let me put as much blood on it as I liked. I had so

much fun making entrails!"

As she continues to build an empire of horror-inspired confections, Rothwell is in very good company. A quick Google image search of "horror cakes" turns up a stunning array of genre-themed edibles, with styles ranging from Rothwell's light-hearted creations to the gut-churning realism of UK cake creator Miss Cakehead's notorious — and anatomically correct — "edible autopsy" and human butcher shop events.

While Rothwell keeps her designs mostly on the whimsical end of the scale, she admits that her cakes have curbed an appetite here and there.

"I created an eyeball [cake] complete with a juicy optical nerve, which was too much for a few of my Facebook fans," she confesses. "My style is rather cartoony more than realistic so I don't see them as too disturbing, but to a lot of people, the thought of eating an eyeball, entrails or brains, cartoony or otherwise, is just too much."

APRIL SNELLINGS





# ASTRON-6 ENLISTS CULT FAVOURITES FOR *THE EDITOR*

Indie collective Astron-6 – makers of the 2012 horror-comedy *Father's Day* – has wrapped production on its giallo epic *The Editor* and brought on board some genre favourites to help do it. Lending their talents to the Winnipeg production are film actors Laurence Harvey (*Human Centipede 2*) and Paz de la Huerta (*Nurse 3D*, *Enter the Void*), Broadway star Samantha Hill (*Phantom of the Opera*), Goblin's Claudio Simonetti, who is currently composing the film's main theme, and famed artist Graham Humphreys, who designed several posters for the movies-within-the-movie (one for *Tarantola* is pictured below). They join Udo Kier (*Flesh for Frankenstein*, *Suspiria*, *Blade*) and Astron-6 members Adam Brooks, Matt Kennedy and Conor Sweeney.

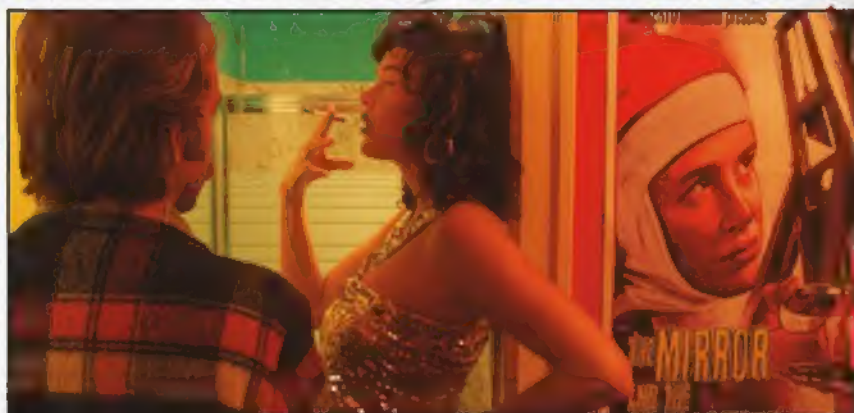
"Working with the likes of Udo Kier was an amazing experience, and to bring that level of actor on board an Astron-6 production really helps to legitimize the product," Kennedy explains. "Once you have names people know or faces they've seen, I think you're automatically taken that much more seriously... I hope."

Kennedy plays Inspector Porfiry, who's trying to solve a series of vicious murders surrounding mutilated former film editor Rey Cisco (Brooks). Tristan Risk (*American Mary*) co-stars as a young starlet, Harvey is a priest, Kier appears as one Dr. Casini and Hill plays his assistant Bella.

"These are not only the best actors we've ever worked with, they're some of the best people I've ever met," asserts Brooks. "Udo was our absolute first choice for Dr. Casini and in retrospect we should never have cast him in that role – he should have had a much bigger part, he should have played the editor or the detective or anybody who is on screen all the time because he's amazing."

Although the Astron-6 members are being careful not to spoil some of the plot elements, Brooks is particularly excited about giving Harvey a chance to step out of the shadow of his role in *Human Centipede 2*, in which he plays demented human centipede maker Martin.

"I think Laurence has been really underused



**The Editor:** Laurence Harvey as a holy man, (top) Paz de la Huerta's character stands with Rey Cisco (Adam Brooks) and one of the posters made for the film by Graham Humphreys, and (inset) another Humphreys poster.

since [that film and] I wanted to cast him against the Martin character type. Laurence is a real intellectual and an artist. He's also low maintenance, which is nice."

Stretching their budget by a wearing a dozen or more hats each, both on set and in post, allowed Brooks and Kennedy to hire some of their heroes.

"Normally a movie that is five times our budget doesn't get names like this but we do because we're stealing our locations and not paying ourselves and doing the set decoration and costuming and lighting and transport and catering, etc.," says Brooks.

"The posters and the music are both so important to us because they add that extra layer

of authenticity," Kennedy says of the decision to secure Simonetti and Humphreys. "Score is perhaps the most important part of making a giallo a giallo. If it doesn't have the right music, it's useless."

Additional music is being contributed by French electronic musician Carpenter Brut and Astron-6's Jeremy Gillespie, who also co-wrote *Father's Day* (RM#120). Brooks says that it was particularly difficult to secure just the right music to give *The Editor* a proper giallo flavour.

"I'm very happy with the Simonetti song, it's powerful stuff. We've been dealing with a lot of musicians on this thing and it's just so hard to get something that sounds legitimately evil. I kept telling them, 'Make music that I'd be afraid of if I was a kid, that I wouldn't even want in my house on a tape or record if I was twelve.'"

DAVE PACE



## MAN-CORN IN THE PROMISED LAND

TALES OF CANNIBALISM & OTHER EXTREME FOLKLORE

CHAIRMAN WOW

"There is this constant dread, waiting for the other shoe to drop in these page turners, where 'the predator longs for the prey/as the prey longs for the predator' in tales of cannibalism, fate and wildness, policy, warfare, and the overall decay of the human condition." - [AnotherUniverse.com](http://AnotherUniverse.com)

"It's the literary quality of his writing that marks Chairman Wow and his darkly haunting narratives worth reading." - [Small Press Bookwatch](http://SmallPressBookwatch.com), [Reviewer's Choice](http://Reviewer'sChoice.com)

"Man-Corn in the Promised Land is a compilation of gruesome short stories, political satire, and witty verse." - [Readers' Favorite](http://ReadersFavorite.com)





# EIGHT GENRE MOVIES IN TWO YEARS FOR BLACK FAWN FILMS

Black Fawn Films – the Guelph, Ontario-based production company behind the recent low-budget apocalypse film *Antisocial*, the upcoming horror film *Ejecta* (penned by *Pontypool* author Tony Burgess) and *The Drownsman* – recently inked an ambitious deal to produce eight more genre titles over the next two years. Of those, Black Fawn co-owners Chad Archibald and Cody Calahan will direct two films each.

The deal is the result of a partnership with Breakthrough Entertainment, the Toronto-based production company behind such decidedly non-spooky TV shows as *Kenny vs. Spenny*, *Less Than Kind* and *Dudley the Dragon*. The first teamed up in 2011 when Black Fawn approached the studio with the idea that would become *Antisocial*. ("Imagine Facebook turns all its users into zombies," summarizes Archibald.) Black Fawn signed on for two more films with Breakthrough: *Antisocial 2*, which started filming in July, and *The Drownsman*, which had its world premiere at this summer's Fantasia Film Festival in Montreal.

"They just jumped at the idea," Archibald says of the deal. "You like doing this, we like doing this. It's working out for everyone. How many do you think you can do?"

He says that Black Fawn's upcoming slate of films, which will tentatively go into production this September in southern Ontario, will be "pretty diverse." The



only common denominator, he says, will be his company's desire to not add to the glut of "generic" low-budget horror films currently flooding the marketplace.

"We've had ten of our ideas turned down from the studio already," Archibald says of Breakthrough's quality control process. "They're being very strict about how we're approaching them and the concepts and whatnot. So are we."

The next Black Fawn film audiences will get to see is *The Drownsman*, about a young woman whose fear of water leads her to encounter the titular boogeyman. It will tour the festival circuit through the

fall before debuting on DVD tentatively in early 2015.

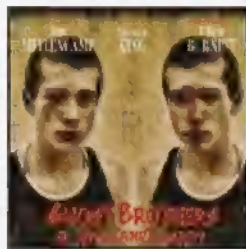
For Archibald, who directed the film and co-wrote it with Calahan, it gave him the chance to come up with what he hopes will be an iconic creature in the mode of childhood heroes such as Michael Myers, Freddy Krueger and Pinhead.

"It was so much fun developing a character, creating its back story. You have no rules. There's a level where it doesn't have to be overly real. Like Freddy Krueger is the bastard child of a thousand maniacs. It doesn't really make sense, but it sounds pretty awesome."

SEAN PLUMMER

## ENTRAILS

Stephen King's supernatural musical *Ghost Brothers of Darkland County* will tour North America this fall. The Southern Gothic yarn, which features music by John Mellencamp, follows two duelling brothers forced to spend time together in a haunted cabin, where they're visited by the ghosts of a pair of dead siblings. The tour begins November 8 in Orono, Maine, and ends in San Francisco on December 5. In other King news, it's been announced that a new, R-rated film adaptation of his classic novel *The Stand* will be directed by Josh Boone (*Lisey's Story*).



A proposal to erect a statue of Glenn Danzig in Austin, Texas, was listed on the agenda of a recent meeting of the Austin Music Commission. James Moody, owner of live music venue The Mohawk, submitted the idea, suggesting that the statue should see Danzig perched on top of a dragon. Though the idea started in jest, he said, "if they're willing to do

it in gold, I'll submit it as a serious idea."

A VHS copy of Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* seems to be haunting a bus stop in South London. Back in 2011, London commuter Tom Wateracre noticed the tape on the roof of the stop and began documenting its movements on Twitter. The VHS tape is mysteriously replaced whenever it becomes sun damaged and recently two copies appeared at the same time. It is even visible from Google Maps street view of Old Kent Road.

A Kickstarter campaign for a comic series that pits some of the nastier members of society against zombies has reached its target of \$19,000. *Toe Tag Riot* follows a punk band that turns zombie and feasts on bigots when they play, leading to a climactic battle against the infamously xenophobic Westboro Baptist Church. Creators Matt Miner and Sean Von Gorman describe the series as a

"tongue-in-cheek, lighthearted torrential downpour of blood and guts."

A 17th-century church in the Czech Republic has been taken over by ghosts. After falling into disrepair and being closed to the public, local artists found a way in and turned the structure into a haunting art installation. Cloaked, ghost-like figures have been placed in the pews, as if praying, and shadowy figures stand in the aisles. Members of the public will have trouble finding the church, however, as the exact location of the installation has been kept secret.

Alice Cooper has announced he is hoping to write a book on his drinking club, The Hollywood Vampires. Regular members of the club in the '70s included Ringo Starr, Harry Nilsson, Micky Dolenz and Keith Moon. Cooper recently took to his social media sites to ask fans to send in photos, stories and artifacts from the site (The Rainbow Bar and Grill in LA) to help him achieve his goal. Twitter users should hashtag their posts with #HollywoodVampires if they have contributions.

CHARLOTTE STEAR.

## MONSTRO BIZARRO

Bigfoot flicks continue to crash out of the woods. Following *Willow Creek*, directed by Bobcat Goldthwait (*RM#145*), comes *Hunting the Legend* from Image Entertainment. Written and directed by Justin Steele, it centres around a son's search for his father, who vanished in the Alabama woods five years earlier; horrifying consequences, including an encounter with a Sasquatch, ensue. In addition, the Australian film *Throwback* saw its US premiere at the Famous Monsters Film Festival and is currently awaiting a video release. Helmed by Travis Bain, and set in remote North Queensland, it pits treasure hunters against the legendary Australian Bigfoot known as the Yowie. And finally, according to director Eduardo Sánchez (*The Blair Witch Project*), the highly anticipated Bigfoot flick *Exists* is in line for a Lionsgate release no later than October.

LYLE BLACKBURN

MORE MONSTRO BIZARRO AT RUE-MORQUE.COM





# CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

CASE NO.

147

Until the early 1900s, some doctors believed that mental illness could be cured by removing a patient's teeth, stomach, colon, testicles or ovaries (among other body parts).

Steven Spielberg originally approached Stephen King to write the screenplay for *Pollergeist* (1982). Unbeknownst to King, his publisher, Doubleday, demanded an enormous sum of money for the author's services prompting Spielberg to look elsewhere for a writer.

Gary Dudek of Wallingford, Pennsylvania, was arrested and charged with stealing skin from a local-area hospital in May. The charges indicate he'd been ordering extra skin grafts for years, though the authorities don't know what he used them for.

Up until 1960, a toilet had never been shown onscreen before; screenwriter Joseph Stefano noted (in the book *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho*): "I thought if we could begin to unhinge audiences by showing a toilet flushing...they'd be so out of it by the time of the shower murder, it would be an absolute killer."

The doctor who was treating French Cardinal Richelieu in the days leading up to his death in 1642, made a last-ditch attempt to save him by feeding him a concoction of wine and horse manure.

Hollywood legend has it that future stars Alan Ladd, Randolph Scott and Buster Crabbe each played unbilled "man-beasts" in the 1933 film *Island of Lost Souls*.

A Kentucky-based "mommy blogger" was arrested and charged with murder this June; authorities suspect she poisoned her young son with salt over a number of years in order to make her website more popular.

In *City of the Living Dead* (1980), actress Daniela Doria vomited real sheep entrails during the "purging" death scene.

In 2010, a 24-year-old muslim woman from New South Wales was strangled by her burka when it got caught in the wheels of the go kart she was driving

When an alien bursts out of John Hurt's chest in *Alien* (1979), the actors reactions are genuine; Ridley Scott did not warn them of what was going to happen in the scene.

Sweden's witchcraft trials of 1669 saw 85 adults beheaded and burned, and 36 of their underage offspring beaten for their participation in their parents' alleged occult activities.

Some of the screams delivered by Maureen O'Hara during the sequence where her character, Esmeralda, is being tortured in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939) actually belong to Fay Wray. They were borrowed from earlier RKO production *King Kong* (1933).

A Brazilian man died last year due to internal bleeding after a cow escaped its enclosure and wandered from the hillside onto his roof, where it crashed through the ceiling and crushed him while he slept.

COMPILED BY MONICA S. KUEBLER  
GOT A WEIRD STAT OR MORBID FACT? SEND IT TO: [INFO@RUE-MORQUE.COM](mailto:INFO@RUE-MORQUE.COM)

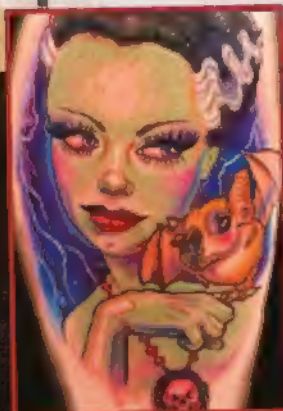
## BODY HORROR

BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN

ARTIST: Suspiria ([suspirialand.blogspot.com](http://suspirialand.blogspot.com))

◀ "My client just wanted a Bride of Frankenstein tattoo, and pretty much gave me freedom on the composition of the piece. I found a beautiful picture of Elsa Lanchester as a reference and added a bat on her hand, as if she were some sort of Snow White calling her animals in."

HAVE A GREAT HORROR TAT? SHARE IT WITH US AT: [INFO@RUE-MORQUE.COM](mailto:INFO@RUE-MORQUE.COM)



## THE RUE MORQUE SICK TOP SIX MURDEROUS MUSICIANS



1. **SLUMBER PARTY MASSACRE II**  
DRILLER KILLER GRINDS ON GUITAR
2. **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (1989)**  
ERIK SERVES HEAD SOUP
3. **FROM DUSK TILL DAWN**  
MARIACHI VAMPS SLAY 'EM AND PLAY 'EM
4. **THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES**  
PHIBES' CORNUCOPIA OF CREATIVE KILLS
5. **PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE**  
SCABBY SWAN MEETS STABBY PHANTOM
6. **ROCKTOBER BLOOD**  
BILLY CUTS AND GUTS ONSTAGE



## TORTURED TAGLINES

**MOTHRA (1961)**  
RAVISHING A UNIVERSE  
FOR LOVE!

## Necronomicomics BY JAY P. FOSGITT



STOLEN PIC-A-NIC BASKETS WERE NO LONGER  
THE BIGGEST CONCERN IN JELLYSTONE PARK.

See more of Jay's work at [jayfosgitt.com](http://jayfosgitt.com)



# NEEDFUL THINGS



## 1 HAUNTED STAMPS

\$8.50 CAD

Fear-loving philatelists should check out these scary stamps from the Great Fright North – each one features an image evoking a true tale of terror from Canada's creepiest places, where dying brides, haunted hotels and genuine ghost trains abound.

Lick your fears at [canadapost.ca](http://canadapost.ca).

## 2 BATS THROW BLANKET

\$20

You can never have too many bats in your cave. And now when you're ready to curl up on your couch for a Dracula marathon, you can keep your shivers to a minimum under this microfiber (with satin trim) throw blanket, festooned with the creepy critters.

Bedding becomes a belfry at [sininlinen.com](http://sininlinen.com).

## 3 GWAR THROBBLEHEAD

\$49.95

Create Ragnarok-esque chaos among your collectibles by adding this pair of "throbbles" to the lineup – Gwar's Oderus Urungus and Balsac loom tall at 6.5 and 7.5 inches, respectively, and come fully costumed and armed for battle. Plus, a portion from each sale goes to the Dave Brockie Foundation, which encourages advancement in the arts.

Bobbing Scumdog statues at [aggronautix.com](http://aggronautix.com).

## 4 WWDD? T-SHIRT

\$19.99

Impale a priest, decapitate a journalist who's asking too many questions – when you think about it, the solutions of the Boy Antichrist do have a certain brutal simplicity about them. When you're seeking guidance, ask yourself (as this T-shirt does) "What would Damien do?"

It's all for you, Damien, at [fearwerx.com](http://fearwerx.com).

## CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES

### PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE 12" FIGURES (Medicom Toy, 1999, 2007)

Winslow Leach – the disfigured protagonist of 1974's *Phantom of the Paradise* – received the action-figure treatment in 1999, courtesy of Japanese-based Medicom Toy. Released as part of the Real Action Heroes line, the twelve-inch-tall Phantom featured a highly detailed helmet, black "leather" costume with voice box and silver-lined

cape. It was available in both a "suicide" version with knife and a "warning" variant, complete with toilet plunger. A revised figure was released in 2007. All are highly sought after and sell for \$175 to \$250 each on eBay.

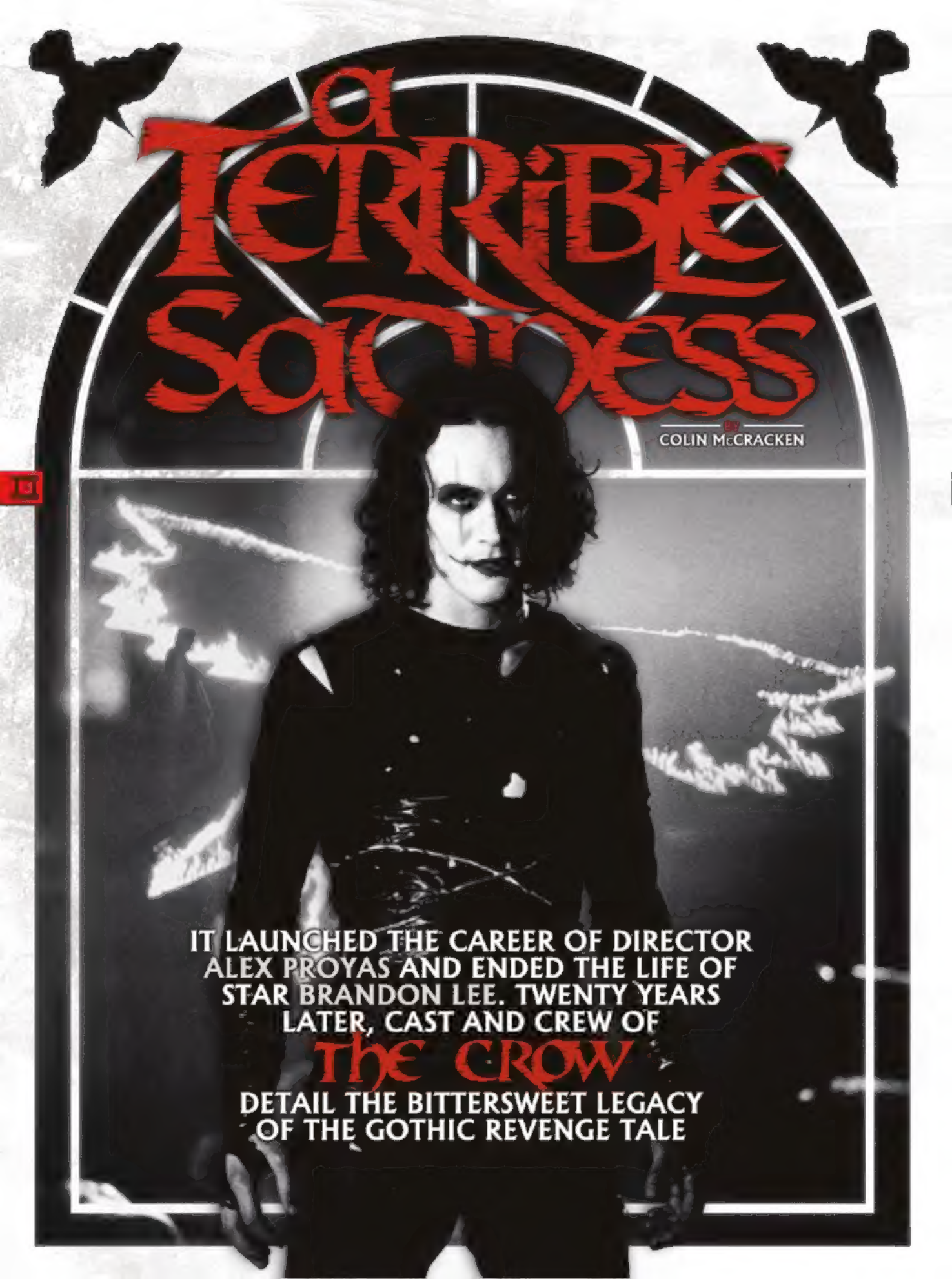
JAMES BURRELL

MORE CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES AT [RUE-MORGUE.COM](http://RUE-MORGUE.COM)

All prices USD unless otherwise indicated.

ROOM 14





# A TERRIBLE SADNESS

BY  
COLIN MCCrackEN

IT LAUNCHED THE CAREER OF DIRECTOR  
ALEX PROYAS AND ENDED THE LIFE OF  
STAR BRANDON LEE. TWENTY YEARS  
LATER, CAST AND CREW OF

## THE CROW

DETAIL THE BITTERSWEET LEGACY  
OF THE GOTHIC REVENGE TALE



# "PEOPLE ONCE BELIEVED THAT WHEN SOMEONE DIES, A CROW CARRIES THEIR SOUL TO THE LAND OF THE DEAD."

Twenty years ago those words introduced audiences to *The Crow*, Alex Proyas' feature debut, based on the comic books of Detroit native James O'Barr. The first R-rated adaptation of its kind, it created a template for the gothic anti-hero, which fit perfectly into the nihilistic pop culture of the era. Genre fans were drawn in by its dark aesthetic and violent, gruesome scenes of retribution, but the film found mainstream success and adoration thanks to an unforgettable portrayal from its leading man.

Brandon Lee became the epitome of tragic beauty as Eric Draven, a budding musician murdered on October 30, Devil's Night — the night before his wedding — when destruction spreads through the city like raging wildfire. His bride to be, Shelly Webster, is assaulted, raped and left for dead, only to pass shortly afterwards. The solace that a young companion, Sarah, found in the couple has been destroyed forever, casting her back into the uncaring world her mother inhabits: one of drugs, miscreants and squalor.

Before long, Draven rises from the grave and, guided by a crow, seeks out the perpetrators of his demise, systematically exacting revenge in a methodical and bloody manner. A range of unforgettable villains stands in the way of his redemption, as Lee transforms himself into *The Crow*: an angel, a ghost and a warrior.

*Ghostbusters*' Ernie Hudson co-starred as Sergeant Albrecht, a disgraced police officer who becomes a confidante to both Draven and Sarah, played by Rochelle Davis. Michael Massee (*Lost Highway*, *Carnivale*) took on his first major role as Funboy, a villain who takes orders from smirking, sword-wielding gangster Top Dollar (Michael Wincott: *Alien Resurrection*, *Hitchcock*), whose twisted associates include Myca (Barling: *Three Extremes*) and Grange (Tony Todd: *Candyman*, the *Final Destination* series).

The men responsible for bringing O'Barr's vision from page to screen are producer Jeff Most and writer John Shirley (*RM#114*). At the time, the pair were developing a pitch based on a cyberpunk novel called *Black Glass*, for which they were seeking a comic book artist to provide illustrations. This led to the discovery of *The Crow*, which they found through indie publisher Caliber Comics (for the history

of *The Crow* comics, see p.19). Knowing they were on to something special, Most and Shirley began outlining a pitch for an adaptation.

It took over 50 rejections before Most found an ally in veteran producer Ed Pressman (*American Psycho*, *Phantom of the Paradise*), who made a deal with Most and O'Barr, with Shirley attached as writer. Writer David J. Schow (*Leatherface*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III*) was employed after the fourth draft. Alex Proyas, an Australian filmmaker who had gained a reputation in music videos and commercials, was brought on board to direct. His reel was the stuff of legend and his noir aesthetic and dark sensibilities made him the perfect choice.

Johnny Depp and Christian Slater were discussed for the title role, but Brandon Lee, son of legendary martial arts expert and actor Bruce Lee, was offered the lead and made the character his own.

With an alt-rock soundtrack that encapsulated the spirit of the early '90s (see p.20), Eric Draven/*The Crow* represented a tragic anti-hero that not only fit contextually within the era, but also became the perfect framework within which Lee could shape his character. Lee greatly understood, and empathized with the material. In a video interview for the film (courtesy of Miramax), he speaks about how he felt that "[*The Crow*] is not for mass consumption," adding, "it's not necessarily a pretty subject, but it's one that I feel is justified. It's a wonderful role, and it's one you have to take risks with. I've done other films with violence in them, but never have I felt the violence as justified as I do now."

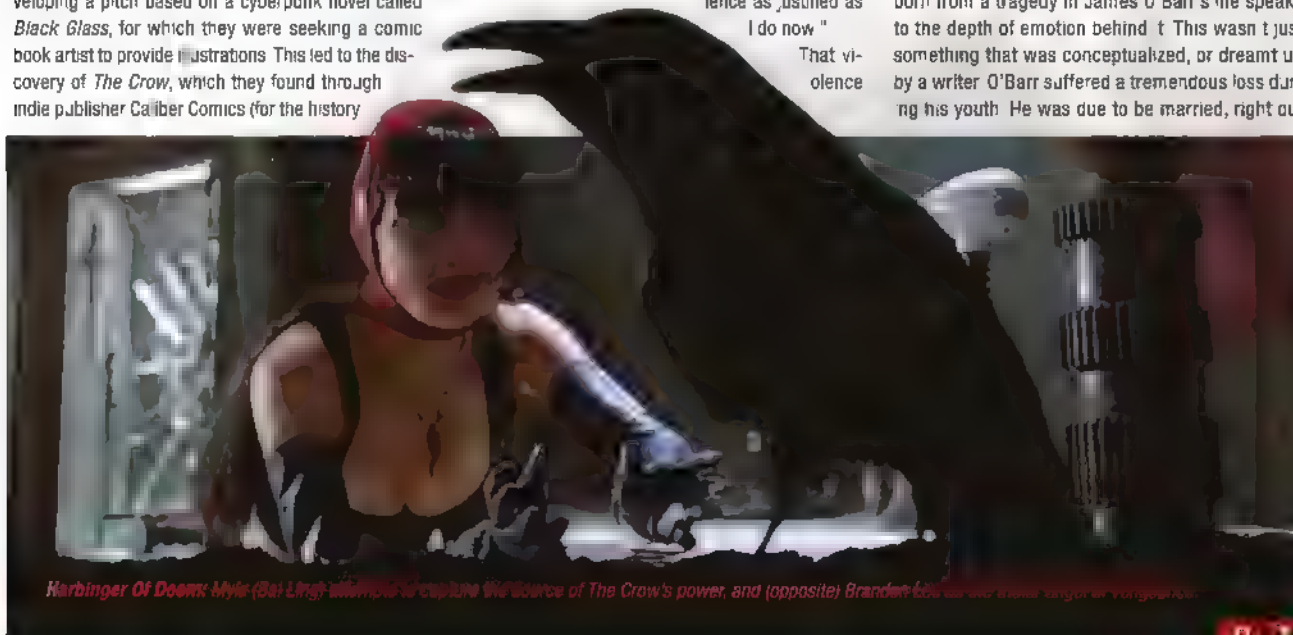
That violence

had tragic repercussions when Lee was accidentally killed on set by what was supposed to be a dummy load in a prop gun. Miramax took over distribution duties and provided a further \$8 million to complete the shoot, at the urging of the cast and crew, who wanted the actor's legacy to live on in the movie. It became a resounding success, if somewhat tarnished by the media, which was constantly striving to take a ghoulish angle on it all, often ignoring the fact that Lee and the filmmakers created something entirely new: a stylishly dark revenge tale for genre fans. It took some of the cast and crew years to recover from Lee's death, and some, Proyas and Wincott included, remain notoriously tight-lipped about the film.

Most spun *The Crow* into a series, working on three sequels featuring new incarnations of the title character, with actors as diverse as Vincent Pérez, Eric Mabius and Edward Furlong donning the white makeup and iconic black coat. Even a TV series (*The Crow: Stairway to Heaven*), starring Mark Dacascos, enjoyed a brief run in the late '90s. With a reboot in the works, we've gathered exclusive interviews with those who were there to celebrate twenty years of *The Crow*.

## Can you elaborate upon the origins of *The Crow* and how it all came to be?

**Jeff Most:** It was based on folklore from different societies, in which the soul is carried to heaven on the wings of a crow. The fact that this material was born from a tragedy in James O'Barr's life speaks to the depth of emotion behind it. This wasn't just something that was conceptualized, or dreamt up by a writer. O'Barr suffered a tremendous loss during his youth. He was due to be married, right out



Harbinger Of Doom: Myka (Barling) attempts to capture the essence of *The Crow*'s power, and (opposite) Brandon Lee was the iconic, larger-than-life hero.



of high school. I don't know if this story is known to people, but he was engaged and the bride-to-be's parents insisted that they both graduate before getting wed. In June of his high school year during the short period between graduation and the wedding date, the woman that James was supposed to marry was murdered in a hit and run. The driver was never discovered. James sought refuge by joining the Marines. [At one point], he couldn't get himself out of bed for months, and was horribly depressed. He was an artist and so this character became his means of cathartically working through the things he'd lost. His tremendous emotional need to, somehow heroically be able to put her memory to rest, came by allowing that injustice a means by which to be rectified. From that horrible experience, this deep emotional material was born.

**John Shirley:** The Crow is an anti-hero. People were angry [in the early '90s] that the bad guys had won. The '60s promised revolution, and then

MLK and Malcolm X were killed and rock music was pushed aside, to some degree, by disco in the '70s and '80s. Then the whole yuppie thing happened, which ushered in the greed of the '80s and '90s and people reacted. In that milieu anti-heroes appeared. *The Crow* was another character who made the powerless feel powerful. The Jungian dark side came alive.

**The comic is extremely violent, with a dark superhero for a protagonist. How did that affect your approach when it came to adapting it?**

**JM:** The violence in the first issue and other things that the character did were far outside the realm of anything that had been shown in features at that point. This was a challenge, but one of the things that James and I felt strongly about was the film would have to be as dark and true to the comic as he had rendered it on paper or it would kill the spirit of it.

**JS:** The tone was something I had an instant affinity for. I'm a goth kinda guy; my favourite superheroes are weird and dark, like Batman and The Creeper. I responded to the rock 'n' roll iconography that was present. There were images of the

hero that were very much inspired by photos of ggy Pop on stage, for example.

**How did Alex Proyas develop and personalize *The Crow*?**

**JM:** Alex was a director who possessed real genius with a vision in terms of how to create a lot of this. He had an amazing plan as to how to bring this comic book to life. One of the things that he did during the early stages of production was bring over a friend of his, a very established comic book artist in Australia named Peter Pound. He literally drew every storyboard as if it were a comic book panel. They were drawn to a level of detail which I had never seen and have never seen since. That was carried through with Andrew Mason, our VFX supervisor, who subsequently worked on the *Matrix* films.

**How involved was Brandon Lee in the developmental stages?**

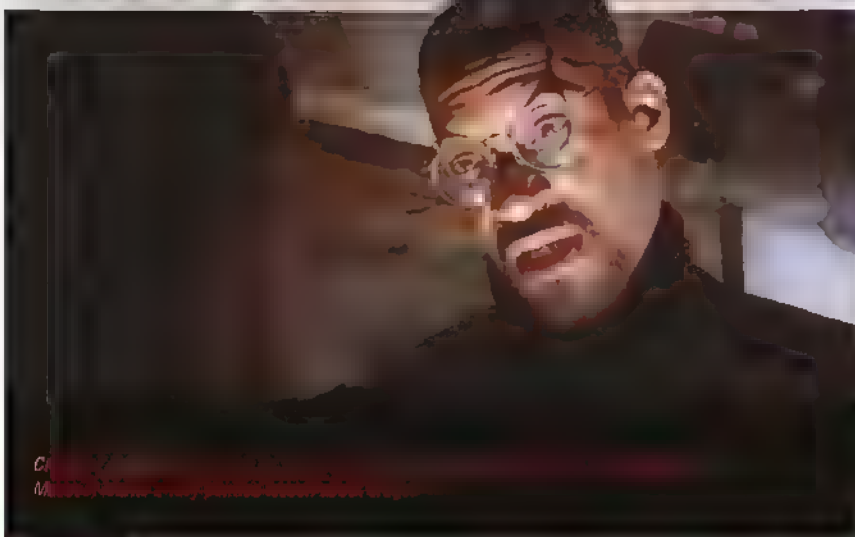
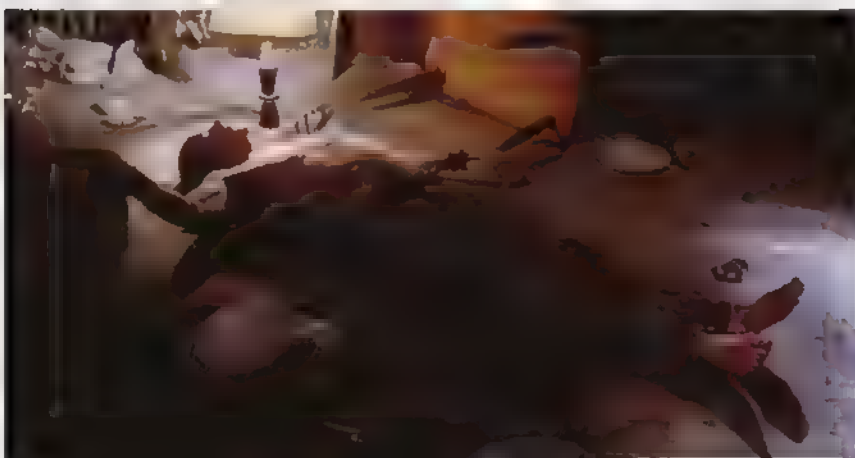
**JM:** Brandon came in and had a very strong viewpoint on this. He felt that the way to make this world accessible and believable was to have only one supernatural element, and that be his character. There was also The Skull Cowboy [from the comic], and that worked because he was another like The Crow, but one who went off his mission. We had more [comic book characters], such as a Soothsayer, who ended up appearing in *City of Angels*. Brandon had some very smart thoughts about how this world, and his character should be perceived, and we were responsive to that.

**What are your prominent memories from your time on set?**

**JM:** We made everything as organic as possible so that it all mashed together to create a distinct world that felt like something we could envision in a believable context. Somewhere that was five minutes in the future, but was also a place we could imagine ourselves inhabiting. All of the individuals who came together brought something great, and it was those individual talents which amounted to the beautiful film which came to life on screen. It was risky, but definitely worth it.

**Rochelle Davis:** The sets were incredible. It was an aesthetically beautiful film, especially from the standpoint of watching it being made. There were so many things I remember watching after-hours. Alex was fine with having me around, so I got to see a lot of it take place, which was magical. They didn't make the whole story that obvious to me when auditioned but it was great to find out when I was there.

**Michael Masses:** *The Crow* was different from anything else I'd worked on, and a lot of it was because we were under constant rain. It was freezing cold but everyone was having a really good time and we worked hard, it's difficult to know if anyone had any





A BRIEF LOOK  
AT 25 YEARS OF THE CROW  
IN COMIC BOOKS REVEALS...

# Many Faces of Death

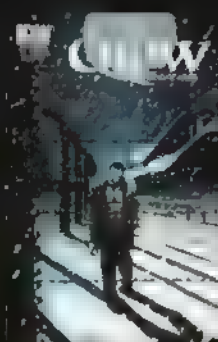
BY COLIN MCCRACKEN

James O'Barr, the writer and original artist behind *The Crow*, took a personal tragedy and transformed it

into a legendary comic book. After the death of his fiancée and childhood sweetheart, he joined the Marines and began working out his nightmares on the page, resulting in *The Crow*, an undead harbinger of judgement and retribution.

The character first appeared 25 years ago when indie publisher Caliber Comics ran the one-shot anthology *Caliber Presents*, which included *The Crow: Inertia*, an eight-page introduction to the world of the titular hero Eric, which sees him hunt down one of the thugs responsible for his lover's murder. It sets the template for *The Crow* as the Angel of Death, seeking his revenge upon a corrupt band of miscreants. The harsh black and white pages of the comics reflected a world where terror and destruction reigned, and hope and retribution were limited.

O'Barr, a big fan of classic cinema, as well as rock music, filtered his influences through his work, often quoting bands such as Joy Division and The Cure. In the original stories, Eric resembled a hybrid of Alice Cooper and a young Robert Smith. He trained in martial arts and found solace in his animal companions, including a white cat named Gabriel and a crow that would speak directly to him.



O'Barr's original run featured Eric (the surname Draven was added for the film), but that character died off with

Brandon Lee, and since then *The Crow* has taken on many guises, shapes and incarnations. While Proyas' feature faithfully portrayed the initial series of comics, the last twenty years have seen a range of variations.

That said, O'Barr seemed to distance himself from certain elements of the series in the mid-'90s, handing over, for example, the comic adaptation of *City of Angels* to writer John Wagner and artist Phil Hester. O'Barr has worked closely on the recent comic titles, though, with artists Jim Terry (*Skinning the Wolves*) and Antoine Dode (*Curare*) on their runs, which take place in a concentration camp and as part of a '70s gumshoe case, respectively. Other titles, such as one that saw *The Crow* become a bare-knuckle boxer in Juarez (*Pestilence*), had no direct input from O'Barr, leaving the story to Frank Bill, with Drew Moss taking on the artwork. Even Todd McFarlane (*Spawn*) created his own vision of the character in 1999, with a story by Jon J. Muth.

In short, there are many titles spanning a wide range of locations and times throughout history, and *The Crow* himself has been through many permutations, all of which, however, maintain the beautiful darkness of O'Barr's original anti-hero.

Idea of just what a powerful entity we were creating. We were tying in every story about good and evil. It was a mythical tale in an unbelievable place, which had come to life via a director whose use of colour was just fascinating.

**Ernie Hudson:** They had the crow out there, the actual bird, and it got too cold for it to fly, so they took it away to protect it. Brandon was walking around with no shirt or shoes on. They didn't even have heaters. I remember telling them that it was freezing and that they'd have to put some up.

**Tony Todd:** People were driven. The stunt team, too. I remember the sequence we had with the shoot-out around the conference table, we must have had 30 stunt guys there for an entire week. Fully committed, not just doing the normal reaction shot and falling against the floor. Each kill was specifically designed, surgically planned and meticulously choreographed. This gave a new level to the material.

**Bai Ling:** When they were shooting the big table scene at the end, there were signs everywhere which said things like "Do Not Touch" or "Explosive," and at that time I still didn't speak much English so people were always yelling, "Bai Ling get away from that, you'll get killed!" I couldn't read the signs, I was oblivious to everything like that. I was there but not there at the same time, because my mind couldn't understand so much of it. I had never been in a situation like this. It was all very alien. Very unique. There was attractiveness to the darkness of it all.

## What did the film mean to Brandon?

**JM:** When we brought him on board, he was involved with our development for close to a year before we started filming, from around April of 1992, when he had finished *Rapid Fire*. He was an incredible influence on the script, production and development.

**EN:** I knew that Brandon didn't want to do the typical martial arts movies, because he was trying to step out of his father's shadow. I think *The Crow* was really different from what was out there, and that appealed to him. We knew the movie would have a distinct feel. There was something about him. I could tell from the moment I first met him in Vancouver, back in '88. There are countless people who have the talent and the charisma but can be a bit wild. You think, "Here's a guy that could burn out with all that extreme living." Sometimes you get that, but Brandon was a sweet, down-to-earth person. I've seen very talented people who have been on a mission to burn out. You respect it, but you know that it's going to end soon. You could tell Brandon wasn't going off the deep end. He took all that energy and shared it. I think everybody in the movie was helped by him. He assisted them in getting the best out of their performances. He'd stand around on set when he could have been back in his dressing room getting warm. He was there to support people because he wanted others to do well. That only made him more amazing.

**RD:** Brandon gave me a lot of guidance, an awful lot. He would give me great advice on how to do a certain scene, how we would interact or react. The graveyard



scene in which he puts his hand up to my face and I lean into him, Brandon and I came up with all of that. We always found ways to make it more interesting. Brandon was the fuel to the fire. He made everything incredible. He would just bring light into your eyes for no reason.

**BL:** Every morning I would sit in the makeup chair for two hours beside Brandon, who would teach me how to play video games. One day he says, "I hear you're Chinese! So am I!" I was shocked, so I replied, "No, you're not," because he looked totally white. He was insistent: "No, it's true, my father is Chinese." I asked what his father did and he told me he was an actor named Bruce Lee. I had to admit I'd never heard of him. Brandon just said, "What?" He couldn't believe it! He told me he was very famous and talked about all of these movies, but I still had no clue. I felt a bit bad that I didn't know, so I called a Chinese friend in New York and asked her who Bruce Lee was. She told me that it was Li Xiaolong and then it clicked! I never knew who Bruce Lee was, because I didn't know the English versions, but I sure knew who Li Xiaolong was! Brandon really saw the funny side! He was very proud of his father and he worked very hard for this role. One time we were having sushi, before the evening's shoot and he was there dressed in black and he would turn away every time I offered him food. He really wanted some, but he had the discipline to stay thin for the shoot. He was working out all the time, to keep in shape and really do justice to the character.

**MM:** You could tell from very early on that this was the role he was born to play. He was so agile; he moved like the wind. It was so beautiful to watch. With the birds flying around and his long hair, it was as-

bounding. I'd do scenes with him and hit him; he'd go down on his back and just pop right back up in my face. Sometimes I'd be so shocked I'd stop the scene. I didn't know how anybody could move that fast, that swiftly or that brilliantly. It was amazing. *The Crow* became Brandon's movie as we were making it; he took control very early and something switched. He took it on, more so than Alex, and I don't mean that as a discredit to Alex because he held the grand vision of what it would look like but, a few days in we were all rallying around Brandon. People were doing it for him. He assumed the responsibility of that and was wonderful in a very gentle, smiling way. I remember the night that he took over and it felt like a natural evolution, had he not done that, it would have been a very different film.

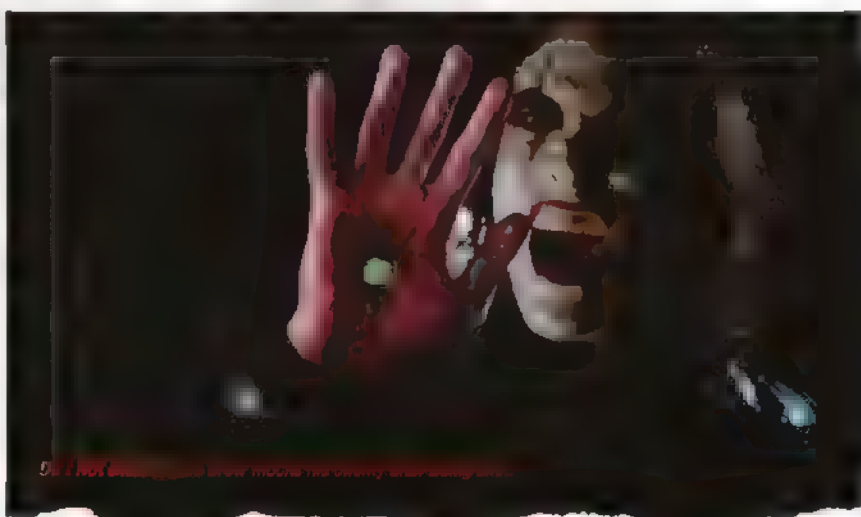
**The villains are just as important to the story as *The Crow* character. Was it difficult to get cast as one of the heavies?**

**TT:** I read for the Albrecht role, which Ernie got; he knocked it out of the park. But they offered me Grange. This was great, because it was cool to be part

of that terrible trio that familial thing with myself, Bai Ling and Michael Wincott. We were such an interesting group, visually I didn't have a whole lot of lines, but my character had this immense presence. ... Alex was very meticulous when it came to casting. There are very few people like that; Oliver Stone is the same. They know what they want and ego be damned.

**BL:** I was brought in for the audition and when I went in, everyone had nose rings or black lips, and they all looked so weird to me. They all had really heavy eye makeup and I was wearing jeans and a white T-shirt; I just looked like a student. I thought I had walked into the wrong place!

**MM:** I auditioned three times and it came down to three of us. I met Alex and so on, so by this time I re-



**JEFF MOST DESCRIBES HOW HE PUT TOGETHER WHAT IS ARGUABLY THE MOST FAMOUS DARK SOUNDTRACK OF THE '90S**

# THE PERFECT DIRGE

BY COLIN MCCrackEN

One of the most distinctive and most memorable aspects of *The Crow* is, of course, its groundbreaking soundtrack. It sold over four million copies and exposed many of the bands involved to an international audience on an unprecedented scale.

Pantera, Nine Inch Nails, Stone Temple Pilots, Helmet, My Life With the Thrill Kill Cult, Rollins Band and The Cure (whose track "Burn" became the movie's main theme) all appeared, amongst others, creating an aggressive, modern backdrop to a new era of the gothic revenge tale. Cherry-picking some of the finest alt rock acts of the day, the album's combination of original songs and cover versions (including Rollins Band's take on Suicide's "Ghost Rider," Pantera's reworking of Poison Idea's "The Badge" and Nine Inch Nails' cover of Joy Division's "Dead Souls") paved the way for a new style of soundtrack, which has been emulated countless times since. Jeff Most—who would go on to work as a producer on the three *Crow* sequels, as well as co-write 2005's *The Crow: Wicked Prayer*—was the man who envisioned it all and subsequently served as soundtrack producer.

"Before entering the film world, I produced, wrote and voice-over hosted this nationally syndicated TV show called *Top 40 Videos*," explains Most. "I had a lot of friends in the business. All kinds of rock stars hosted the show, and I really liked alternative music, so I pitched an idea to [*Crow* creator] James O'Barr while we were writing the treatment."

Most describes the concept for the soundtrack as "the perfect dirge." It would accompany Graeme Revell's dramatic, exotic modern goth score to





ally wanted it, but man, it dragged on for an age. Wincott and Hudson got cast, but the role of Funboy hadn't been. By the beginning of January, I knew that if I stayed at my job waiting tables in New York, I'd never make it as an actor, so I decided to leave town. That Christmas I worked 26 nights in a row. The day that I left, I finished my shift, grabbed a bottle of vodka from behind the bar, took my shirt off and doused it. I lit it up and walked away. I was leaving for LA to start anew, but that weekend Billy Hopkins called me and said that I should stick around, the director of *The Crow* wanted to meet me on Tuesday. I didn't know what was happening, it had taken so long that I kind of lost hope, but I got it.

### **How did you find working with Michael Wincott?**

**MM:** Wincott really worked out his whole outfit, but they told him that he couldn't keep the hairpiece as it was going to take too long to take it off every night, then refit it the next day. He said that it had to stay and if it didn't, he couldn't do the role.

### **From a writer's standpoint, how did you approach his character? He's very different in the comics.**

**JS:** We decided to make Top Dollar more interesting, more dimensional. My idea was to have him be an enforcer for a corporate villain behind it all. One of the producers, whom I won't name, objected to this vilification of corporate one percent types and put the kibosh on that. I think the best elements of Top Dollar came from Dave Schow. [In earlier drafts, Top Dollar was involved in a gentrification led, real-estate land grab something that was affecting many US cities at that time.]

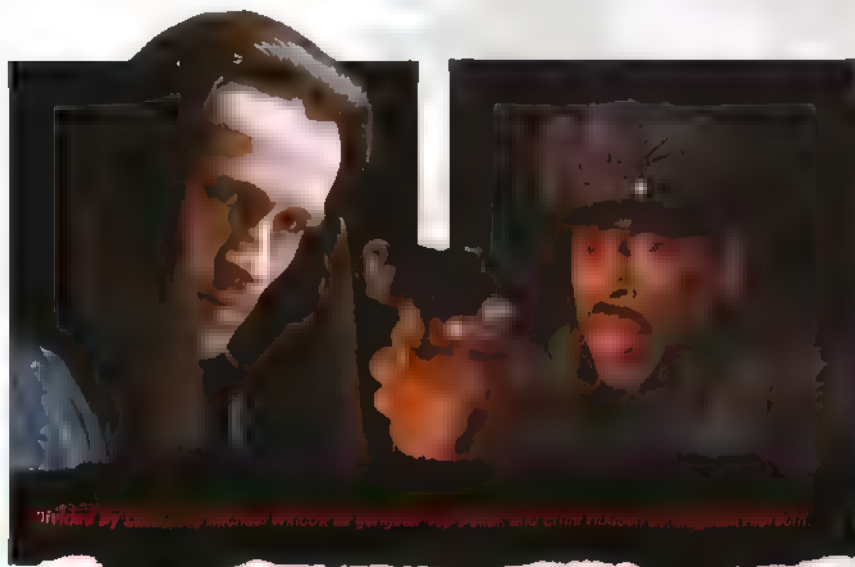
### **Of course, the most difficult thing to talk about in terms of *The Crow* is Brandon's death. It must have been devastating.**

**EH:** When the accident occurred, it was so unreal to me. I mean, how can that happen? When you do everything right that's not supposed to happen to you, it's supposed to happen to the idiot who is out of control. Here was just an amazing man and he had so much to give to the world... He really took Rochelle under his wing and I know that when the accident happened it was devastating for that little girl.

**RD:** It took me about fifteen years to come to terms with it all. It was definitely a process, because I was so upset and depressed. I got a lot of heat from people. Kids in school were horribly cruel. It put me in a place where I thought that I didn't want to be a part of it anymore. I didn't even want people to know I was an actress.

**JM:** When we set our goals to make a franchise out of this, we signed Brandon for three films to play Eric Draven. It was quite a shock to the system when we lost him, in every respect possible. He was a dear friend and an incredible colleague. He was a genius and the most wonderful guy, who was fun to hang out with. Brandon was a person with passion and everything before him, so when we lost him, our whole plan for the franchise was set aside. I felt that it would be disrespectful at that time to look for someone to fill his shoes.

**RD:** They were going to shelve it and that was something the actors were all completely against. We went

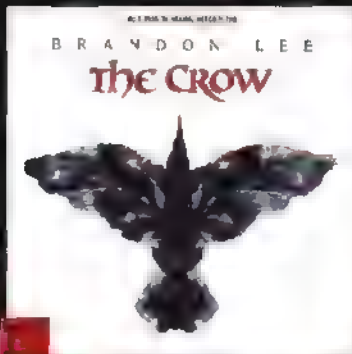


provide a very emotional, often mournful backdrop for the movie.

"I always saw *The Crow* as a rock and roll hero," Most elaborates. "The world of music started to become a really strong theme during development; Eric Draven became a guitarist in a small band. I thought it was interesting to give him the qualities that I felt were akin to what I was seeing on the pages of the comic. James was using Iggy Pop, Peter Murphy and people like that for inspiration. The comics were dedicated to Ian Curtis of Joy Division, of whom I am also a huge fan. There's a lot of rock and roll lyrics in the comics too, from The Cure and others. It just felt to me like there was a very strong music connection there and I wanted to bring that forward in the character and the film."

Most and director Alex Proyas discussed at length the idea of making the soundtrack stand out as an entity on its own, and comprising it entirely of tracks that hadn't been heard anywhere before, whether they were original compositions or new covers. While the script for the film was being developed, Most

searched for a record label that understood what they were going for, but was turned down by everyone. Things changed when they were put in touch with Trent Reznor's manager. They soon had a meeting with the NIN frontman.



"I told him all about this album I wanted to put together and about the comic, sent him one, and we started talking about bands," recalls Most. "Trent really liked the bands that I had in mind. He said, 'Is somebody really going to let you do this?' and I said that if he said yes, he'd be the anchor, I thought I'd be able to go get a record label to go for it. Trent said yes, which allowed me to put together the album with many of the artists I had dreamed about working with on the movie. Interscope and Atlantic Records, which distributed Interscope at the time, became great partners."

Still regarded as one of the finest soundtracks of the '90s, it wasn't long afterwards that Reznor took the concept and further developed it for his work on *Natural Born Killers*.



to the producers and the director and said it wasn't fair to Brandon. He worked so hard at this, and to just shelve it would have broken his heart. They finally said they were going to send everybody home for a month or so. They needed to figure out what the heck they were going to do to make the movie work.

**BL:** The second time we came back to shoot and I saw him onscreen, I was in this dark room and I had goose bumps. My hair was almost standing up. I felt like he was in the room with me. I felt his presence. He didn't die. He exists in a different format and he's watching us.

**MM:** We all grew up when that happened. It was really wonderful to work with Alex then. Brandon was gone but Alex picked up the mantle. ... When I returned to the set, Alex took control of that movie in a way he hadn't up until then. He pushed the studio away and forced them to back off. He said that they were going to finish the movie and finish it well for Brandon.

**JS:** I'd have liked to [remain a part of it all] and I did a little work on a treatment for the second film, but my heart wasn't in it, partly because of Brandon's death. I didn't know the guy, but I still felt that death painfully, partly because I was a bit on the angry-young-man side.

### How do you think the incident affected the legacy of the film?

**MM:** I think that what Brandon and Alex Proyas set out to do is only now being fully realized. People have been able to leave the accident alone and not drag the film down with it. The journalists refused to let the

film speak for itself. They had to lambast it with their bullshit.

**TT:** The film is stigmatized because of the accident and it has received a lot of the wrong type of press. After the incident happened there were a lot of speculative articles released about the jinxes of *The Crow*. I wasn't aware of anything going wrong or anything being out of hand. I was released two days before it happened and I'm very fortunate and thankful for that. It would have left me even more marked.

**JM:** I've known so many people over the years who have stayed away from seeing the film because of the tragedy that befell Brandon, and the expectations that some people had as to whether it was a horror movie. Unfortunately, more often than not, it's classified as one. It is at its heart, a love story, essentially. It's about trying to care for the loss of a loved one and it's about the archangel opportunity to put things right and I think that's very resonant material.

### What do you believe is so timeless about *The Crow*?

**JS:** That it took a very young male state of mind — rage and revenge — and elevated it into something like Goya or Munch. I feel it's solidly in the stream of noir and the best horror films, too, like *Nosferatu*. It's also hybridized with films like *High Plains Drifter* and *A Fistful of Dollars*. *The Crow* was a really good synthesis of all that and showed Proyas' visionary directing. Brandon's death is a tragedy but he lives on in *The Crow* because angry people who feel powerless, and who hunger to hold that gun, that sword, and use it for justice — those people everywhere relate to the character Brandon helped create.

**JM:** *The Crow* appeals to teenagers and young adults because not only does it deal with the themes of life and death, love and hate, it does so in a very black

and white way in the manner of which people of that age see the world, admittedly added to by the fact that the film had a very limited colour palette.

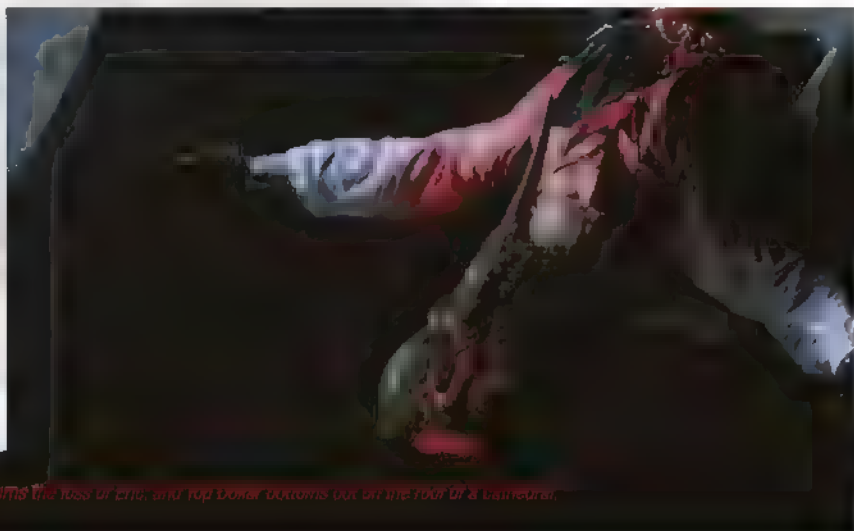
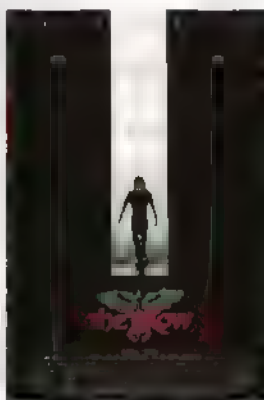
**TT:** There's a reverence to the film and that's the best way to sum up the project. It's a great film noir — a love story to rock and roll and a testament to what the spirit of rock really stands for.

**EH:** It is definitely out there. It wasn't the structured way that I've done a lot of movies. The people involved wanted to do something unique and different. It was a strange, dark time, but it was also a very creative one. Everybody was bringing a lot of creativity

to the fore, even the actors. That was the first time I worked with Tony Todd and I've worked with him a couple of times since. Michael Wincott was amazing. He's very unique and Bai Ling — all the guys just had something.

**BL:** I've watched it a number of times and I'm very close to the movie. I'm very proud of it and, despite what happened, I think [Brandon's] still here with us. He would be proud of it, and he's so beautiful as Eric. It was a fantastic job and we should celebrate his work and his life, and what he contributed to the film. It's great because of him.

**MM:** I think that not only does the film hold up very well, but you could put it up against anything released today; it's timeless that way. The story is eternal. As long as there are human beings there will be treachery and love and vengeance. I didn't even know people thought of it as a horror movie. It's *Romeo and Juliet* in a different universe. 🍷



Can't Hear the Silence Sarah (Michelle Davis) mourns the loss of Eric, and Top Dollar looks out on the roof of a cathedral.



WITH A SPECIAL EDITION OUT THIS MONTH, WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES OF BRIAN DE PALMA'S **PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE** TO RELIVE HOW THE 40-YEAR-OLD HORROR-MUSICAL WENT FROM COMMERCIAL FLOP TO CULT FAVOURITE



by JUSTIN HUMPHREYS

**P**HANTOM OF THE PARADISE IS THE GREAT DARK HORSE OF '70s HORROR. WRITER/DIRECTOR BRIAN DE PALMA'S 1974 FILM IS A FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER OF A MOVIE MADE OF CINEMATIC, LITERARY AND ROCK MUSIC ALLUSIONS – A BLACKLY COMIC UPDATE OF THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, WITH MAJOR NODS TO GOETHE'S *FAUST* AND *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*, AMONG OTHERS.

It's equal parts horror movie, rock musical, vicious satire, farce and romance, and somehow it all works. With its excellent performances, distinctive camera work and unforgettable Academy Award-nominated score, *Phantom* had all of the makings of a *Rocky Horror*-like cult hit. But its unconventionality initially proved to be its undoing.

As its producer, Ed Pressman, recalls, "One of the problems with the film was that it was combining a lot of different genres. It was hard to define what the audience was."

But that was 40 years ago.

The film started to take shape in 1973. De Palma (*Cat People*, *Dressed to Kill*) didn't want to become synonymous with horror thrillers, he'd previously made

mainly experimental madcap comedies, such as 1968's *Greetings*. But his film *Sisters* (1973) had been a genre hit, so for his next project he decided to combine horror with farce. Enter *Phantom*, a screenplay by playwright/screenwriter Louisa Rose. The property was initially acquired by producers Pressman and Paul Williams (not *Phantom*'s co-star, but a different Williams), along with *Sisters*. *Phantom* was subsequently renamed *Phantom of the Paradise* and was heavily rewritten by De Palma, with his revisions continuing even after filming began in late November 1973.

Its plot follows naive composer Winslow Leach (William Finley: *Sisters*, *Enter a Woman*) as his masterpiece, "a pop cantata" based on *Faust*, is stolen by Swan, a Phil Spector-like rock impresario (pop singer/songwriter Paul Williams) who



has sold his soul to the Devil. ("Early on, I remember, we talked about getting a real rock 'n' roller like Mick Jagger to play Swan," notes Prassman.) Framed, imprisoned and disfigured, Winslow dons an elaborate costume and proceeds to exact his revenge within Swan's new rock palace, the ironically named "Paradise," including electrocuting a drug-addled glitter rocker named Beef (Gerrit Graham: *Demon Seed*). Caught in the crossfire is Winslow's muse, a gifted singer named Phoenix (Jessica Harper: *Suspiria*), who desperately wants to find fame.

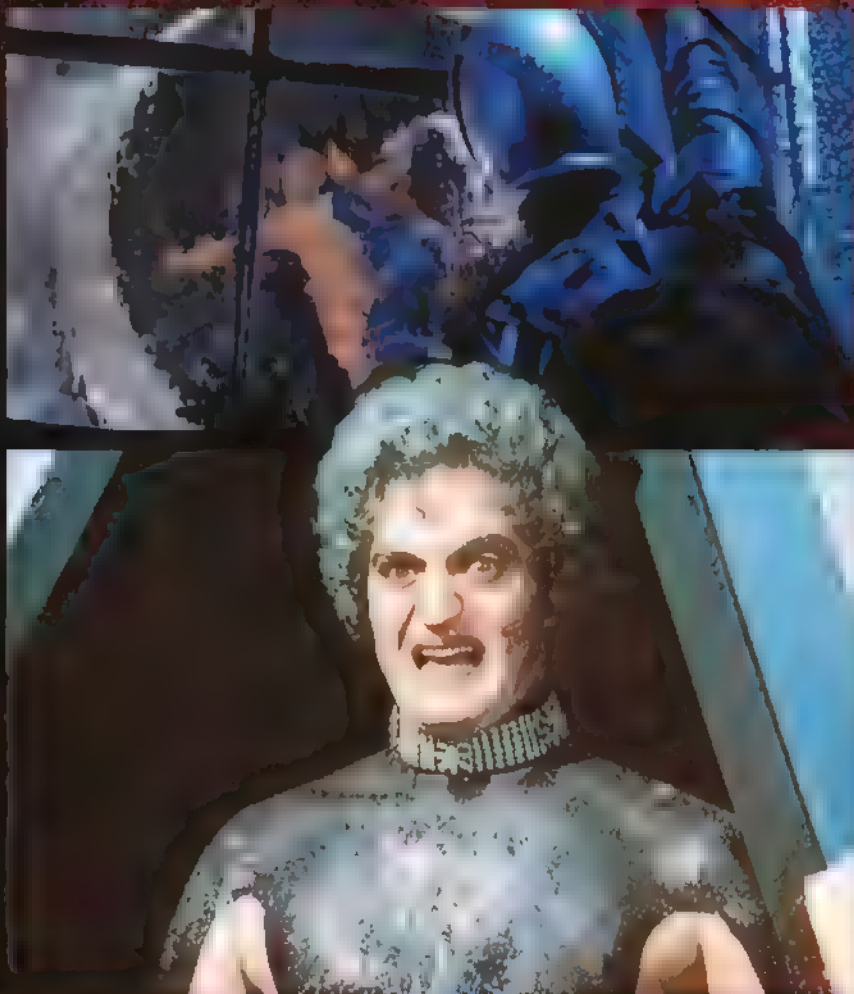
"I thought the rock world is so stylized and expressionistic to begin with, that it would be a perfect environment in which to tell old horror tales," explained De Palma in 1975 interview with *Cinefantastique* magazine's David Bartholomew. In the dawning era of Alice Cooper and KISS, the filmmaker saw the obvious link between horror and rock, which can be traced through the script's evolution. For instance, the impresario's name was changed from "Dorian" (as in Gray), to "Spectre" (as in Phil), before De Palma finally settled on Swan.

As the script was fleshed out, De Palma's most obvious contribution became the story's obsessive voyeurism. Like many of his films, *Phantom* is squarely focused on peeping. In one key sequence, for instance, the Phantom tearfully watches Swan and Phoenix making love, as Swan, via a video feed, observes the Phantom watching them.

Also typical of De Palma, his favourite films factored heavily into *Phantom*'s construction, particularly the British classic *The Red Shoes* (1948). Its story of a composer's stolen score and of a ballerina sacrificing her life to an impresario for her art is echoed here, both through specific plot points and shots. Other classic horror references include nods to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) and *House of Wax* (1953).

"It's a little bit of *House of Wax*," acknowledges Finley, elaborating on the concept for his hideously scarred, vengeful, plotting character in an interview before his death in 2012. "The mask itself, just the concept, was my idea, but the execution was brilliant. It was done by the Burman brothers. They took the idea of a beak and the round helmet and made it into something very sinister, much better than anybody I can imagine. ... I wanted [the suit] to look like a motorcycle/spacesuit. Futuristic. I don't know where that came from, but I knew it had to be very modern looking, and then on top of it goes the cape, which of course is totally un-modern. So it makes a very interesting look."

*Phantom* was further inspired by real-life rock tragedies. The 1972 on-stage electrocution of Stone the Crows' Leslie Harvey inspired Beef's similar end, while the movie's climactic carnage was influenced by the murder committed during the Rolling Stones' set at the Ai-



Now You See Me: Gerrit Graham as doomed glitter rocker Beef, and (above) The Phantom William Finley watches his love bed down with his enemy



tamont Music Festival, caught on camera in the 1970 rockumentary *Gimme Shelter*. De Palma took this self-referencing even further by hiring *Gimme Shelter*'s cameraman, Robert Elstrom, to appear in *Phantom* as a cameraman. These sorts of strokes would factor heavily in later De Palma films, including *Blow Out* (1981) and *Body Double* (1984), which reflexively explore the muddy region between reality and illusion, and a society that can't tell the two apart.

As De Palma said in that same *Cinefantastique* interview, *Phantom* examines "a culture looking for bigger and better highs, whether it is nostalgia or reminiscing or Armageddon. It is whatever moves them and the intensity of what moves them is being escalated all the time. It is a very desensitized and de-emotionalized culture. They have turned themselves off with drugs and detachment, and they're looking for things to make them feel alive. ... The Kennedy assassination is probably the most entertaining thing ever seen

watched the television set for days and days, and that is entertainment on a scale that no one could ever come up with." (Ironically, the movie's fictional venue Paradise is actually Dallas' Majestic Theater, which is less than a mile away from the infamous grassy knoll.)

De Palma's desire to incorporate so much reality led to legal problems. Beef was originally "Captain Beef" but the name was deemed too close to that of rocker Captain Beefheart. Led Zeppelin forced him to erase references to Swan's record label, originally called Swan Song (a name the band owned). Fortunately, the fictional label's new name, Death Records, inspired one of the film's most pivotal images.

*Phantom*'s production designer Jack Fisk (*Mulholland Drive*) recalls: "I walked out of my house one day in Topanga Canyon [in Los Angeles]... and there was this perfectly formed [dead] bird laying on the ground. And I thought of a songbird and took a photograph of it, and that became the symbol for [Swan's] Death Records."

Death Records' belly-up songbird bookends the film, and became its central metaphor—the media and its public, it proclaims, like dead singers more



than live ones.

The ill-fated title character was crafted specifically for Finley, De Palma's friend and long-time collaborator. The men had worked closely together since college, and their shared love of horror movies permeated their joint projects. Lanky and distinctive-looking, Finley became *Phantom's* backbone as the naïve Winslow and the furious *Phantom*.

"Winslow is a darling," he explains. "It's just that he's maimed and framed. Every horrible thing happens to him, and he keeps bouncing back. I love the idea of that. ... I thought that he's the innocent at all times, no matter what, no matter how bad things get. So I was trying to do that with the *Phantom*, so he can be doing horrible things, but he'll still be somewhat sympathetic. So the secret for rooting for Winslow is that, even though he's obviously gone berserk, people still sort of like that he's gone berserk."

With a budget of only \$1.3 million, De Palma's crew had to carefully stretch their resources. Luckily, Fisk excelled at building spare but evocative sets that cleverly conveyed character.

"A lot of times, if I couldn't control stuff, I just would just cover it up with cloth to simplify it," he says. "I wish that the cinematographer had let things get a little darker, like at the night club with the words flashing and stuff. I saw too much detail. ... I saw the film five years ago and I remember being upset when I saw that he over-lit stuff, because on our budget, there were a lot of things that I couldn't simplify or take care of."

On the upside, there were some happy accidents that help give *Phantom* its iconic look. Fisk cites the prison set as an example.

"We were looking for a prison for Finley to escape, and I went to all the prisons in New York and they all seemed pleasant. But we were storing our props at the Pressman Toy Company. I would go back there and I would go, 'If I could just find someplace as depressing as this toy company...' And then I thought, 'Maybe this should be here!' So we put bars on the windows; we made them out of wooden dowels and stuff. And we had the prisoners, instead of making license plates, making tiddlywinks. And we changed the logo from Pressman Toys to Prison Toys."

Other New York locations were also used, though much of the film was shot in Dallas, Texas, and Los Angeles.

"It was just a strange conglomeration of people on that film, with an LA crew, a New York crew, a Texas crew all trying to get along, working together over the hol-



**Dressed in Black:** The *Phantom* confronts Swan (Paul Williams), and (above) the iconic Death Records logo.



idays," recalls production manager Gary Kent. "It was very strange. And a lot of behind-the-scenes problems occurred, but what went on in front of the camera, what they got on film, I thought was great."

The biggest challenge the cast and crew faced was a flu epidemic that swept through the production. It was so bad that actors were throwing up before and after takes, and a doctor was called in to give everyone shots.

"That was horrifying," says Finley, "because one would give it to the other and turn it right back. I think the only person who might not have been sick was Jessica [Harper]. Even Paul got sick. I was sick as a dog. Gerrit was really awful — he kept throwing up. It was just awful — he'd do a scene, he'd do his big music number, he was throwing up during and after, and it was just horrifying."

Yet, there were worse things that Finley had to deal with. Aside from his agonizingly painful helmet, which blocked most of his vision and hearing, he was nearly killed while shooting the sequence in which Winslow is disfigured by the record press. There were wooden blocks holding the factory gates open but they started to fail.

"One of them cracked or bent and they pulled me out — grabbed me and ripped me right out and it went!" the actor remembers. "That would have been one dead person, no *Phantom of the Paradise*."

The shooting conditions on the film were sometimes tough but rewarding. And lurking among *Phantom's* hard-working crew was some major budding talent: Jack Fisk's wife (and De Palma's future Carrie), Sissy Spacek, was set decorator; actor Bill Paxton (*Aliens*) worked (uncredited) on Fisk's crew; and Stanley Weiser, screenwriter of *Project X*, *Wall Street* and *W.*, had his first film job on *Phantom*, as a production assistant.

"Unlike most studio movies, there was a sense of appreciation and awe at almost all levels of bringing the film to life," muses Weiser. "And the people who worked on it weren't just doing a gig, they knew that this was something special. At least I did, and I was only a PA."

Though the cast generally got along well, their response to De Palma was mixed. Pressman — who is also producing De Palma's upcoming movie *Happy Valley* — recalls, "It was very, very genial and friendly. Brian has a reputation for being aloof, but we got along. [We were] very collaborative."

Kent had a different experience. "There are gregarious directors like Richard Rush — even the stoic Monte Hellman would show up and say 'Hello' to everybody, to the crew and stuff, especially the main people," he says. "De Palma primarily talked to the cameraman and that was about it. The rest of the crew he kind of ignored. So, sometimes, I found out what he needed just by bugging him — what we were going to need the next day, who had to get where, or what was going to happen because Ed Pressman didn't know the scheduling. Brian De Palma, probably a good director, but to me he was aloof and not communicative."

According to Kent, what De Palma lacked in warmth, Williams made up for with his personality, which kept spirits up on set.

"He had a great sense of humour. He wasn't a diva at all and would joke with the crew. All the things that Brian De Palma wouldn't do, Paul Williams would do: talk to everybody and try to make you feel that this film was going to be something. Because the crews will follow the director and if the director doesn't know what he's doing, they'll follow the cameraman. And in this case neither one communicated with the rest of the people. So to find out what you were going to



need and what was going on was almost impossible. Sometimes, I would have to get it from Paul...which is unusual."

Williams' music is, of course, central to the pathos of *Phantom*. The songs capture the story's shifting moods, from the deliberately insipid Beach Boys' parody "Upmystery" to the haunting "Old Souls."

"I was known for the kind of 'Hallmark Card' lyrics," Williams said during a presentation of the film at the Museum of the Moving Image in 2013, explaining how his "bubble gum" image was subverted for the movie. "My thought was, if Swan is in fact an incarnation of the Devil, he would have to just be so charming, so slick. ... He's so beautifully evil."

Meanwhile, Graham's over-the-top Beef emerged when De Palma suggested that the actor act "more like Little Richard," meaning wildly effeminate. Graham said on the TV show *The Media Funhouse* in 2007, "I thought they were kidding. It was just schtick to me. But that is exactly what they wanted. I'm here to tell you that's all the development that went into the character and whoever Beef is, whatever that character is, just happened to be lurking inside me somewhere."

Though De Palma has been described as cold and aloof, his early films were often made in improvisational and highly collaborative ways. His casting choices in *Phantom* reflected this, particularly with Swan's key band members: improv comedians Peter Elbling and Archie Hahn,

and singer/songwriter Jeffrey Comanor.

"It was, by chance, a terrific find, because we all brought something to it," explains Elbling. "As we often lamented, we were sorry the film was not a huge success, because during the time, we often thought if this film goes well, the three of us could go on the road very easily. ... I think our three personalities just worked very well together."

To represent the interchangeability of pop stars and the music industry's trendhopping tendencies, the threesome ended up satirically portraying all of the film's bands: The Juicy Fruits, The Beach Bums and the Alice Cooper-like The Undeads.

"We all contributed," recalls Comanor. "That's the funny thing about Brian: he didn't have much to say. I think we all had [hotel] rooms on the same floor, pretty close to each other, and we opened our doors and rehearsed in the hallway. We made some other guests not too happy, I should think."

Elbling affirms that being left to their own devices paid off. They knew they had gone in the right direction when they finally revealed their work to De Palma.

"There was a level of trust and confidence in what we were doing that allowed Brian to just step back and let us play. ... The night before we shot The Juicy Fruits sequence, he said, 'I should see what you've been doing.' We had been rehearsing and living in this hotel in Dallas, so we went to the ballroom or wherever, and they turned the music on and we did our thing. And Brian, I think, was knocked out by it."

Filming wrapped in January 1974, and without a doubt, *Phantom* was pure De Palma, full of his visual trademarks: fish-eye lens shots, cross-tracking (following a character from front and back), cinematic in-jokes, and his inevitable split-screen sequence. He had created a frenetically paced film that was after-



**Identity Crisis:** The syrupy Juicy Fruits performing a pop song, and (above) *The Phantom* gets unmasked.



ately moving and hilarious, packed with outstanding songs and solid performances, all on a mid-budget. Its success seemed assured, but getting it to connect with critics and audiences was another matter.

Twentieth-Century-Fox acquired *Phantom* for distribution, but the film's odd nature deeply confused their publicity department. Its clumsy trailer catered to teenyboppers and its posters were confusing. Critics also had *Phantom* in their crosshairs.

Comanor got a taste of it firsthand from *Rolling Stone* editor Jann Wenner, who invited him to a private screening at the magazine's offices. As the credits rolled, Comanor says, "He just looked at me and said, 'Great film,' and he did it in that way where you're obviously saying the opposite. I should have smacked him right on the spot."

Typical of the critical reaction was the *New York Times*' Vincent Canby, who snidely called it "an elaborate disaster, full of the kind of facetious humour you might find on bumper stickers and cocktail coasters."

After a dismal opening, the producers decided to re-release the film on their own, in their own way.

"[Fox] spent money going the wrong way," balks Pressman, of the initial release. "We created a whole new campaign ourselves for the re-release of the film, with Richard Corben artwork, and a TV spot. ... We opened the film [ourselves] – in those days you could do it, it wasn't so expensive. We picked the smallest TV market, Little Rock, Arkansas, and reopened the film there and bought a lot of television [advertising]. It cost maybe \$15,000 dollars to blanket the city. And it worked. ... Then we went to Memphis, then Dallas."

Ultimately, though, *Phantom* was still a flop. Even Paul Williams' Academy Award nomination for Best Original Score didn't help.

"It was terrible," laments Finley. "It was just so totally unexpected because, to me, it's such a delightful movie. Critics were very hard on it, and it didn't do well at the box office, people didn't want to see it. And the kids that it was supposedly designed for didn't want to see it. It was just a total shock."

In a small coup as peculiar as *Phantom* itself, the only cities that the film originally was a hit in were Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Paris, France. Decades later, the Canadian city became ground zero for *Phantom*'s revival. When *Phantom* was first playing in Winnipeg, Finley was aware of its mysterious popularity there.

"It was an anomaly," he says. "I was so happy that it was playing somewhere. But I couldn't believe it. ... People in Winnipeg think that because parents brought their children to *Phantom* instead of [leaving them with] a babysitter, and enough kids went at that age – thirteen, twelve or younger – that it stayed a major influence on everybody."

Winnipeg native Gloria Dignazio's *Phantom* obsession was covered in a 2004 *Winnipeg Free Press* article featuring a photo of her in a Death

Records T-shirt. Soon after, her phone started to ring off the hook. "[It was] *Phantom* fans, all male, all my age, who all wanted the Death Records tee," Dignazio says. "We still connected very deeply with the film."

A group of local fans assembled and tracked down Finley and Graham, who agreed to attend a *Phantom* convention in 2005, at Winnipeg's Garrick Theatre. It was the first Phantompalooza. A second one in 2006 drew even more *Phantom* alumni. Beyond that, the Library of Congress houses a 35mm print of the film, and this month sees a special edition Blu-ray release of the movie (from Scream Factory in North America and Arrow in the UK), along with a 40th anniversary screening in Los Angeles featuring cast and crew.

"All of the *Phantom* people are so happy that they're finally getting their due," affirms Finley.

*Phantom of the Paradise* has broadly influenced the movie and music industries over the decades.

Directors Guillermo Del Toro (who, Pressman says, tried to buy the original helmet off of him) and Edgar Wright rank it among their all-time favourite movies, often alluding to it in their own work. Writer/director Roger Avary (*Pulp Fiction*) pursued remaking it. And French electronica duo Daft Punk's love of the film extends to their *Phantom*-like costumes and a Grammy-winning collaboration with the movie's co-star/composer, Paul Williams.

In the end, *Phantom* could not be stopped. "I've been enjoying its enormous popularity today," beams Pressman. "Seeing that it stands up is really very exciting. That is an undiluted delight."

Interview material with William Finley and Jack Fisk originally appeared in Justin Humphreys' *Interviews Too Shocking to Print*, available from BearManor Media.



**Phantom Power:** (clockwise from top) Swan finally revealed, Beef gets ready to perform, The Phantom takes over the studio, and Jessica Harper as Phoenix



**MOTEL HELL** DIRECTOR KEVIN CONNOR REVEALS THE  
SECRET INGREDIENTS IN HIS BELOVED BACKWOODS SLASHER  
JUST IN TIME FOR ITS BLU-RAY PREMIERE

# AMERICAN GOTHIC



**MAN** ROCKWELL, WHOSE IDEALIZED PORTRAITS OF AMERICANA ADORNED THE COVERS OF *THE SATURDAY EVENING POST* FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS, ONCE SAID: "THE VIEW OF LIFE I COMMUNICATE IN MY PICTURES EXCLUDES THE SORDID AND UGLY."

It's interesting to consider then what the acclaimed painter and illustrator would have made of Kevin Connor's grimly satirical shocker *Motel Hell* (out on Blu-ray from Scream Factory on August 12) had he lived a further two years to see the film's release in 1980.

The scab-picking glee with which it lampoons the Rockwellian version

of American rural life – and its traditional values of hard work, frugality and diligence – hardly seems commensurate with the artist's more celebratory stance. One reason for this might be that *Motel Hell* was helmed by an Englishman, newly arrived in Hollywood like an earnest pilgrim from Plymouth. After directing the excellent horror portmanteau *From Beyond the*



Grave and the adventurous Edgar Rice Burroughs fantasies *The Land That Time Forgot*, *At the Earth's Core* and *The People That Time Forgot* for Amicus Productions, Connor would have been content to begin this difficult juncture of his career shooting the Pasadena telephone directory being recited aloud.

"There's definitely some truth to that," the 76-year-old filmmaker chuckles. "I'd been in LA for three or four months and was desperately looking around for work. I was not having an easy time of it and only had one contact in Hollywood — an agent who unfortunately did not want to take me on. He did kindly offer to make a phone call on my behalf and discovered that United Artists were developing a project called *Motel Hell*. It had been written by Robert and Steven-Charles Jaffe, who were looking for a director who had previously made horror films. So I lugged a copy of *From Beyond the Grave* to the studio in these big 35mm film canisters and showed the Jaffe Brothers my movie. Thankfully, they both loved it, and immediately handed me their script to read."

Returning to his apartment to peruse the screenplay, Connor was taken with the story of Farmer Vincent and his sister Ida who run the Motel Hello, an isolated roadside hostelry. As well as operating the motel, their other business interest is "Farmer Vincent's Smoked Meats," which offers an array of delicious cold cuts, famed throughout the region for the boast that they contain no preservatives. Although local billboards project the catchy slogan, "It takes all kinds of critters to make Farmer Vincent's fitters," the exact ingredients of these culinary delights are a guarded secret — even from Vincent's brother Bruce (Paul Linke), the inept local sheriff. The terrible truth is that Vincent has been arranging car accidents on a nearby road and abducting the injured victims; planting them neck-deep in the ground before fattening up their bodies to source his lip-smacking snacks.

"I thought that basic setup was great, but I shuddered when I read the script's opening lines," recalls Connor. "They were basically this: 'EXT. MOTEL HELLO — NIGHT: The flashing D in HELLO is shorting. Cut to INT. MOTEL HELLO, BEDROOM: A fat woman is in bed with a pig and a dildo...' I thought, 'I've come all the way to Hollywood and this is what I get?' But the truth was I really needed the work and the money. So I told the Jaffe boys that I would love to direct the movie, but only if we removed some of the juvenile crudeness. I then managed to talk them into making *Motel Hell* as a pitch-black horror-comedy. The horror would be played entirely straight, but with our tongues still planted firmly in our cheeks. The boys agreed to this, gave me the assignment, and we began reworking various scenes and ideas."

With *Motel Hell* moving swiftly into production, Connor started assembling his leading players. For the role of the psychotic Ida, he chose Amer-



**Finest Cuts:** Farmer Vincent (Rory Calhoun) and sister Ida (Nancy Parsons) prepare to butcher some fresh meat to make another batch of their famous fitters.

ican actress Nancy Parsons — who would later achieve lasting cult status for her turn as the bellicose Beulah Balbricker in the *Porky's* trilogy. Nina Axelrod (who was, conveniently, the girlfriend and later wife of Robert Jaffe) came on board to play Terry, the attractive survivor of one of Vincent's vehicular traps, whom he later plans to bring into the business as his wife — much to Ida's displeasure. However, finding the right actor for the central role of Vincent proved more troublesome.

"My first choice for Vincent was Harry Dean Stanton," reveals Connor. "I'd visited Harry's house and we'd had several chats about the script and the character. He was seriously considering doing it, but eventually passed. Harry would have been fantastic, but he probably thought that *Motel Hell* was a little beneath him as his career was really starting to take off at that time. I then turned my attention to Rory Calhoun, who was mostly known to audiences as a cowboy star. Rory had that same lean, lived-in look that Harry had and I immediately knew he was perfect for the role."

Awarded a bounteous budget of \$4 million, *Motel Hell* commenced its six-week shoot in April 1980 at Sable Ranch, California, the same location where *The Devil's Rejects* and *Hatchet* were later filmed. It was here that Connor lensed

the movie's most harrowing scenes, depicting the unfortunate fate of Vincent's victims being ruthlessly harvested in his secret garden.

"The garden scenes never fail to disturb viewers," agrees Connor. "The sight of these poor people buried up to their necks with their vocal cords severed so they can't call for help — it's very unnerving stuff. It's those awful gurgling rasps that really creep everyone out! I remember

our sound editor found a gentleman who'd recently had a tracheotomy and had this hole in his neck. This guy couldn't speak and would have to hold a little microphone over the hole in order to force the words out of his throat. You would imagine that a person in his condition would be rather sensitive about it, but he was only too happy to make a series of scary noises for us. The sound editor then recorded his cries and used them to make the victims' pleading shrieks."

Connor confesses that he is unqualified to pontificate on "the dubious delights of slasher movies." Nevertheless, he insists that during the making of *Motel Hell* he did have a strong sense of how very different it was from the slice 'n' dice subgenre it was unhappily lumped in with by critics.

"I wanted *Motel Hell* to have a sense of equality in terms of the victims. Slasher movies were incredibly gory and violent, and always had some bubble-headed teenager getting decapitated by



cont'd on p. 34





**Field Of Screams:** Future trifter victims await their fate, (right, top to bottom) Sheriff Bruce (Peggy Lingo) with Vincent's idea, and the iconic pig's head mask and giant chainsaw.

some lunatic. That was already a cliché by 1980, so we decided to spread the age and gender of the victims around in our film. That way nobody could accuse us of being sexist or misogynistic. It was also far more unsettling for the audience because they had no idea who would die next. That's why I love the scene where the two little girls are scared shitless in the slaughterhouse and run away screaming. I could've had Vincent and his sister murder those children if their parents had stayed [at the motel for] the night. Think what a deliciously disturbing innovation that could have been for the horror genre — little kids turned into sausages!

With its cheerily demented familial characters lurking around a rustic setting, *Motel Hell* is often compared to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Tobe Hooper was in fact attached to direct the film when it was first being developed at Universal in the late 1970s. However, the studio found the torrid brew of murder, cannibalism and power tools unpalatable, putting to rest the project's chances of becoming a fitting third installment in the director's unofficial "backwoods" trilogy consisting of *TCM* and *Eaten Alive*.

"On the strength of his previous work, I'm sure Tobe would have done a fine job with *Motel Hell*," Connor says. "I'd seen my fair share of horror films in England, but I'd never witnessed anything as disturbing as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. At the time, it represented the extreme end of the horror genre and I found it incredibly difficult to sit through. *Texas Chainsaw* was probably the first of those horror movies which took that next forbidden step further and really pushed the envelope. I'm sure in some way it did influence the Jaffe boys in writing their script, but it never influenced me as I was looking to make a film that spoke to my own style

and tastes."

Judging by the infamous slaughterhouse "chainsaw duel" that concludes *Motel Hell*, one can't help thinking that Connor's tastes extend to the traditions of the Grand Guignol. The sequence sees Vincent don an enormous pig's head mask, fighting his brother to the death as a screaming Terry is slowly being fed into the blades of a meat slicer. Connor is intrigued by the suggestion that a little creative cross-pollination might have taken place with Hooper's 1986 sequel, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, which features its own climactic chainsaw duel between Leatherface (Bill Johnson) and Lieutenant "Lefty" Enright (Dennis Hopper).

"It's certainly possible that we in turn influenced Tobe, but having not had the pleasure of meeting him in person I've never had an opportunity to ask," he says. "We filmed our duel over a four-day period in a shed that had once been a disused outhouse. There was no air-conditioning inside and all the pig's heads, haunches and carcasses hanging in our set were real. After several days of intense heat the ripe smell of spoiling meat was sickeningly overpowering, but it was a great sequence to choreograph. The roar of the chainsaws and the meat slicer, and Nina's ear-shredding screams, really added to this insane atmosphere. The whole idea of Nina moving towards the slicer was our equivalent of the girl being tied to the railway tracks in the old silent movies."

Despite having big studio muscle behind it and garnering positive notices, *Motel Hell* opened to a so-so box office. It has resided comfortably in cult obscurity ever since, but to what does Connor attribute the unexpected commercial failure of the film?

"There are probably several reasons for it," he

offers. "There were a lot of horror movies released around the same time as *Motel Hell* and maybe the market was oversaturated. Also, I don't think audiences were as interested in the genre as they perhaps were in the years immediately prior to 1980. The horror curve was going down and, sadly, we caught some of that. But over the years *Motel Hell* has become what they call a 'cult film' and is always playing somewhere on television. It has a strange afterlife and there's been talk of a remake [by Steven C. Miller, director of *Under the Bed*]. Frankly, I'm astonished that people are still talking to me about this simple horror movie I made nearly 35 years ago."

Despite its simplicity — or perhaps because of it — *Motel Hell* has inspired various interpretations from critics. Some view it as a satirical attack on American consumerism, and the greed and excesses of the then-newly-inaugurated Reagan administration. Others read it as a self-reflexive commentary on society's thirst for horror movies as grisly entertainment. Self-effacing to the last, Connor emits an amused chuckle at such notions.

"I've been asked all sorts of political and psychological questions regarding *Motel Hell*. People scrutinize and psychoanalyze it, but I'm not the kind of filmmaker who puts significance and subtext into every single shot. The Jaffe Brothers and I never discussed any deeper meanings or hidden messages in the film, but some people won't accept that *Motel Hell* is merely an hour and a half of morbid, twisted fun. It certainly wasn't designed as a veiled attack on America, its ideals and values, as I've enjoyed living and working here for all these years. That's honestly the truth of it."

We believe you, Kevin. Rest easy, Norman Rockwell. ♥



## GHOST HUNTER STACEY GRAHAM EXPLORES THE INS AND OUTS OF SPIRIT ATTACHMENT IN HER NEW BOOK, *HAUNTED STUFF*

# BUGER BEWARE

BY JEFF SELLERS

**IT'S BEEN SAID THAT A THING OF BEAUTY IS A JOY FOREVER. WHETHER THAT JOY IS ENHANCED OR DIMINISHED BY GHOSTLY CO-OWNERSHIP, THOUGH, IS AN ENTIRELY SUBJECTIVE MATTER.**

Paranormal investigator Stacey Graham tackles the subject of possessed possessions in her latest book, *Haunted Stuff: Demonic Dolls, Screaming Skulls and Other Creepy Collectibles* (out this month from Llewellyn Publications). Graham's new tome is partly a collection of ghost stories and partly a how-to guide for dealing with that lovely but totally possessed tea service you picked up at a yard sale last month.

Graham, who also authored 2012's *The Girls' Ghost Hunting Guide* and co-created the popular *Zombie Tarot* deck, says her interest in the subject stretches back nearly two decades.

"I loved ghost stories, and when strange things happened to me I wanted to know more about why [they were] happening and if there was any truth behind the tales," she says of her ghost-hunting beginnings. "The more I dipped my toe into the paranormal goo, the more I tried to find out if what I had seen and heard was a trick of the mind, or something more interesting. Twenty years later, I'm still curious."

*Haunted Stuff* was born when Graham noticed a mysterious cold spot amid the many volumes dedicated to paranormal investigation. The Washington D.C.-based author found plenty of books detailing ghostly legends and first-person encounters, but relatively few that delved into the subject of ghostly attachment to objects.

"I wanted to explore those stories and talk with people about what they had experienced when their toasters started chatting back to them," says Graham. "What I found was a connection to items that revealed the most basic human traits: love, pain and loneliness."

When it came time to begin her research for *Haunted Stuff*, Graham first turned to a resource already on hand: her own personal files from twenty years of paranormal investigation. The author (and mother of five) says she found plenty of people who were willing to share their stories

for the book.

"I did months of research, both online and off," she notes. "I scoured old books for mentions of oddities such as the screaming skull of Tunstead [Farm] that spoke of a woman's bones being kept in 'cheese-fat' in the farmhouse and if removed from the vat of fat, strange noises would be heard at night and their cattle would die. ... I tried to weed out stories that had little substance or were modern urban legends. Some well-known tales such as the Crying Boy painting didn't make the cut because I couldn't verify the story, while others fell apart with too many variations."

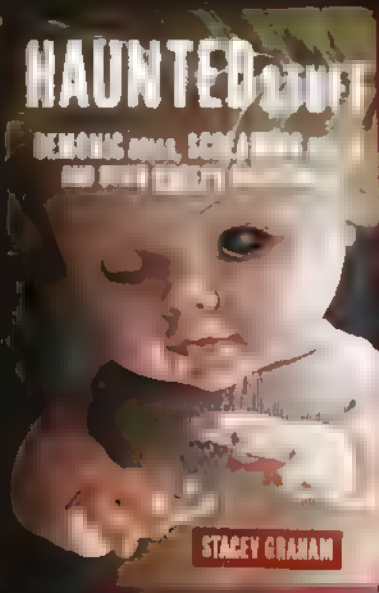
Some of the items cataloged in *Haunted Stuff*—such as Annabelle, the doll recently featured in James Wan's *The Conjuring*, and Robert, the in-

famously ambulatory doll that un-lives at Key West's Fort East Martello Museum—will be familiar to horror fans and ghost-story buffs. Others, such as the story of a moving photograph that might have served as a dead child's way to contact her grieving parents, are from Graham's own archives.

Besides photographs, dolls and other household items, *Haunted Stuff* also takes on ghost ships, eerie hotels and even a notorious electric chair. Though she's hard-pressed to name a favourite case—"It's like trying to pick your favourite weird child"—Graham admits a soft spot for the "suicide brides" of Austin, Texas' Driskill Hotel: two women who offed themselves twenty years apart in the bathroom of Room 427, but seem disinclined to check out.

All of this points to one obvious question: What should you do if your thrift-store find or real-estate bargain comes with a free bonus dead person? Besides the collection of stories, Graham's book also includes sections on recognizing, investigating and living with haunted objects. She offers one important caveat for the accidental ghost custodian, though: No matter how many times you've seen *The Conjuring*, do not attempt a D.I.Y. exorcism.

"I don't recommend trying to 'cleanse' the item. I've never seen it work and you'll just look silly sitting there with chicken blood and salt all over the house."





# CINEMACABRE

FILM + DVD + REISSUES



## TOUCHING THE VOID

### TRUE DETECTIVE

Starring Matthew McConaughey, Woody Harrelson and Michelle Monaghan  
Directed by Cary Fukunaga  
Written by Nic Pizzolatto  
HBO

Over the past fifteen years cable TV has come to dominate as a storytelling medium, with HBO leading the way. Among its Emmy-rich roster, *Six Feet Under*, *Carnivàle*, *True Blood* and *Game of Thrones* have appeared to genre fans, but none of those shows reach as far into the darkness of the human soul as *True Detective*.

The eight-episode first season starts with Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson as Rust Cohle and Martin Hart, two Louisiana cops investigating a serial killer who wraps his murders in ritual and symbolism (including nods to Robert W. Chambers' *The King in Yellow*—see Classic Cut). The narrative switches between 2012 and



the 90s with the former detectives being interviewed about the original case. Cohle (McConaughey) is a deeply misanthropic, damaged former military man with a drinking problem, while Hart (Harrelson) is a

bullish, impulsive former family man whose life imploded due to his infidelity. But as much as they've ruined themselves personally and professionally—and exploded on each other—their determination to solve the case is unyielding. It leads them to a dangerous undercover mission involving bikers, a shootout with methhead kidnappers, a conspiracy covered up by some very powerful people and, most chillingly, a cult practicing ritual child abuse and sacrifice.

Creator/writer Nic Pizzolatto and director Cary Fukunaga have crafted what's called, in one of the special features, a "Louisiana of the mind"—an evil fairy tale world that exists between pungent swampland, belching refineries, sunbeaten backroads and secret-filled buildings hidden in seemingly impenetrable undergrowth. Influenced by *Silence of the Lambs*, *Twin Peaks* and *Se7en*, *True Detective* is a gorgeously shot (on 35mm) descent into madness that showcases stunning performances from its leads—including Michelle Monaghan as Hart's (ex) wife Maggie—and a stellar roots/blues/country soundtrack headed up by Grammy-winner T Bone Burnett.

The special features on the set are okay, with a conversation between Burnett and Pizzolatto offering the most insight into this masterpiece. As Burnett puts it, Cohle and Hart "look right into the skull of the most hideous evil imaginable and they deal with it." As should you, because this is hands down the best show on television right now.

DAVE ALEXANDER

## HOP TO IT

### RIGOR MORTIS

Starring Siu-Ho Chin, Anthony Chan and Paw Hee-Ching  
Directed by Juno Mak  
Written by Lai-yin Leung and Philip Yung  
Wei Go USA

A suicidal, once-popular actor—played by Siu-Ho Chin, in semi-autobiographical mode—moves into an apartment building populated by the odd, the lonely and the vaguely menacing. Around the same

time an elderly resident perishes in a stairwell mishap. From such simple ingredients comes a shadowy tale so full of surprises and arcane rituals that some have termed its plot confusing or nonsensical. That's not the case though; *Rigor Mortis* has a healthy dash of the irrational, but it plays out its mysteries patiently. In the end, the storyline is satisfyingly solid.

The only thing the audience really needs to track is that Anthony Chan's character, a no-



nonsense glutinous rice expert (yes, you read that right), is on hand to oppose the evil things that are afoot. Sure, mysticism is invoked, and eventually there's some stylized fight choreography involving the unstoppable undead, but the real magic is in the performances elicited by director Juno Mak (best known as a pop star in China). There's Chan's low-key charisma as well as fellow HK veteran Paw Hee-





Rigor Mortis

Ching's remarkable turn as the woman who sets the film's monster in motion. Indeed, to witness the expression of tormented shame that overcomes her character in one particular sequence is to experience true horror; we see the limitations of our own humanity in her inability to stop events that she herself has set in motion.

Why dwell on the acting? Because with visual effects, cinematography and storytelling this good there's a risk of dismissing *Rigor Mortis* as "slick-but-empty." An homage to those gloriously goofy hopping vampire flicks of the '80s (both Chan and Chan appeared in that cycle), the film is also a sombre take on what it means to be haunted by a past one can't relinquish.

It's less your standard (or Western) vampire yarn and more a fable of monstrous resurrection à la *Frankenstein* or *Pet Sematary*. The resulting air of tragedy that suffuses practically every scene might

strike some viewers as heavy handed, but if one is familiar with the unabashed sentimentality that can mark Hong Kong films of any genre (e.g. martial arts and gangster flicks), then the verdict is more likely to be that *Rigor Mortis* is deeply felt, not simply corny.

PETER GUTIERREZ

## DARK PASSENGERS

### COLD IN JULY

Starring Michael C. Hall, Sam Shepard and Don Johnson

Directed by Jim Mickle

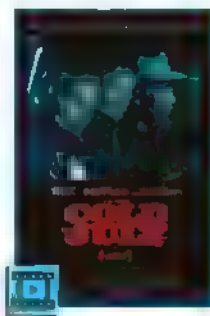
Written by Jim Mickle, Nick Damico and Joe R. Lansdale  
IFC Films

Fish out of water stories can be relatable to people who have found themselves in unfamiliar situations. But in *Cold in July*, the latest film adaptation of a Joe Lansdale book, Michael C. Hall portrays a simple

small business owner who gets unwillingly thrust into a world of murder, manhunts and mistaken identity. This does not make for a reliable film for most of us (phew!) but it does make for a quickly paced thriller.

Just off his stint as everyone's favourite serial killer, Dexter Hall plays a father protecting his family against an intruder late at night. When the incident turns violent and the burglar's ex-con dad (Sam Shepard) returns to town, the film quickly turns from a breaking-and-entering drama into a tense standoff. Quicker than seems imaginable, *Cold in July* shifts from a *Cape Fear* stalemate to a tentative alliance to investigate why these two men have been brought together. With the help of shady local Jim Bob (Don Johnson) they begin to piece together exactly what happened that bloody night and how they can make it right again. Dirty cops, snuff films and 1980s small town east Texas nostalgia all factor into the heavy atmosphere of the film.

Though the movie's course jumps a few times, you never feel as though director Jim Mickle is leading you astray. He's clearly in control, and adept at handling the demands of a story that twists its way through a complicated plot. Lansdale's book shifts directions rapidly and reinvents the focus with many turns, and this reworking maintains the same feeling of being taken for a wild ride. Those familiar with Mickle's pre-



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vious films (*Mulberry Street*, *Stakeland* and *We Are What We Are*) will recognize his long time co-laborator Nick Damici (here as co-writer and co-star, playing Ray Price) and his immersive storytelling, but the similarities end there. In *Cold in July*, it's a man who's the real monster: not rats, vampires or cannibals—and Mick E shows us that he is capable of much more than straight horror films.

DEMDRE CRIMMINS

## REMEMBERING FORRY

### UNCLE FORRY'S ACKERMANSIONS

Featuring Forrest J Ackerman, Bob Wilkins, Don Gut, et al  
Directed by Strophon Taylor  
Written by Strophon Taylor and Teen Wyrsc  
November Fire Recordings

The world's biggest genre fan, Forrest J. Ackerman, was perhaps known almost as much for his incredible personal collection of science fiction, horror and fantasy film memorabilia, as for being the voice of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*. Now the man who was custodian to Bela Lugosi's Dracula ring, Lon Chaney's makeup box and the flying saucer models from 1959's *Plan 9 from Outer Space* is the subject of *Uncle Forry's Ackermansions*.

A cross between a biography and a sort of show-and-tell, the 70-minute program is narrated so to speak, through the use of various audio interviews with Ackerman overlaid onto candid photos and early home videos depicting the writer/editor at work and congregating with friends, fans and well-known genre icons at his three memorabilia-filled homes ("Ackermansions") throughout the years.

For decades Ackerman opened up his abodes to give weekend tours to fans, and the program includes several video clips of him proudly showing off his collection, including photos and paintings, movie posters, books, statues, screen-used masks, costumes, props and more. He also discusses some of his favourite pieces, including original models from 1933's *King Kong*; a first-edition American copy of *Dracula* signed by Bram Stoker, Bela Lugosi, Christopher Lee and others; and a life-sized reproduction of the Maria robot from *Metropolis*.

Aside from the collectibles Ackerman recounts how he first became fascinated with the fantasy genre through reading publications such as *Amazing Stories*, his lifelong friendship with Ray Bradbury and how he got the idea for what would become *Famous Monsters of Filmland* after purchasing a copy of the French-language film journal *Cinéma 57*, which had devoted one of its issues to horror films. Two vintage 1970s interviews with *Creature Features* TV horror host Bob Wilkins are also included.

As impressive as the photos, footage and anecdotes are, the program would have benefitted from insight from some of Ackerman's friends, notably John Landis, Joe Dante and Rick Baker. Additionally, only a few minutes are spent on the house in which Forry would live out the last few years of his life (before passing in 2008). Overall, though, it's an affectionate, heartfelt celebration of a man who brought countless hours of pleasure to millions of monster fans around the world.

JAMES BURRELL



## OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE LAUGHS IN THE FACE OF LEGENDS

### BEAST OF BURDEN

#### BLACK WATER CREEK: THE LEGEND OF SASQUATCH

Reality Films

Nearly every culture has tales of a legendary beast, such as the Jewish Golem, the Nepalese Yeti or the Scottish Loch Ness Monster. For us North Americans, it doesn't get bigger than Bigfoot. *Black Water Creek* follows an alcoholic cop and his new partner as they try to get to the bottom of a rash of murders in a backwater 'burb where property values are falling as fast as the local population. Bodies have been turning up with their faces ripped off. Is it a bear, a serial killer or Sasquatch? I wish I could say, but between the over-the-top acting, repetitive dialogue, corny set pieces, atrocious death scenes and a guy-in-a-gorilla-suit who puts the "F" in WTF?, there's no telling who did what.

BODY COUNT: 12

KILLED BY SASQUATCH: 1 to 4 (maybe)

### BORED TO DEATH BED

#### ALEISTER CROWLEY: LEGEND OF THE BEAST

Reality Films

Prior to watching this film, my knowledge of British occultist Aleister Crowley went about as far as Ozzy Osbourne's lyrics for "Mr. Crowley." Apparently, simply labelling Crowley as an occultist is a disservice to a man who was also a world traveller, mountaineer, poet, painter, novelist and even a secret agent who may have contributed in bringing the US into the First World War. Still, it was Crowley's taste for ceremonial sex magic, bisexuality, drugs and the dark side that were always in the press. Presented as a deathbed confession where he recounts his life, *Legend of the Beast* fails to properly tackle the narrative of a man whose life was a hallucinogenic rollercoaster ride of religious and social revolution... because the one thing it shouldn't be, is fucking boring!

BODY COUNT: 3

KILLED BY CROWLEY: 0

### VARETY YA-YAHK

#### THE LEGEND OF SIX FINGERS

Bloody Earth Films

Sam Qualiana directed and starred in a seriously sick flick I reviewed back in *RM* #135 called *Snow Shark: Ancient Snow Beast*. He teams up once again with co-star/über-nerd Andrew Elias to portray a couple of film students who set out to make a documentary about a Native American beastie called *Ya-Yahk Osnutsha* (or Six Fingers) that they intend to capture on film to make themselves famous. Presented as a found-footage film, *The Legend of Six Fingers* beats the dullness that many similar movies succumb to—you can tell the dysfunctional duo had a lot of fun making it. And kudos to Qualiana for including legendary scream queens Debbie Rochon and Lynn Lowry. Both make cameos in a film that'll prove to be—you guessed it—legendary!

BODY COUNT: 4

KILLED BY SIX FINGERS: 4

LAST CHANCE LANCE



RUE MORQUE CONTRIBUTOR JOSEPH O'BRIEN  
TAKES US DOWN A HIGHWAY TO HELL WITH *DEVIL'S MILE*  
FIRST FEATURE FILM



**J**OSEPH O'BRIEN IS A BIT FREAKED OUT. AS A LONG-TIME CONTRIBUTOR TO THIS MAGAZINE, HE'S NORMALLY THE ONE ASKING DIRECTORS QUESTIONS. Now he's become a horror filmmaker with *Devil's Mile*, a genre mishmash inspired by John Carpenter and Mario Bava.

"I'm not used to it at all," O'Brien says of being interviewed. "Now I'm this ambassador for this movie that I made, and it's a weird experience."

*Devil's Mile* opens with three criminals pulling up to a lonely gas station to ask for directions. In their trunk are two kidnapped girls meant to be delivered to their boss, the mysterious Mr. Arkadi (Frank Moore: *Rabid*). But the hotheaded Toby (David Hayler: voice actor in the *Metal Gear Solid* game franchise) ignores the station owner's warning not to go any further down the road, a decision that will plunge all of them into a nightmare of brutal violence, a hideous

daemon creature hunting them down and other surprises that steadily eat away at their sanity.

The story was inspired by a "road trip from hell" O'Brien took years ago when his then-boss, B-movie producer Damian Lee (*Food of the Gods II*), tasked him with hiring someone to drive his Chevy Suburban from Toronto to Lee's home in Malibu, California. O'Brien decided to do it himself and recruited a couple of friends to accompany him. The road trip turned bad when the car kept breaking down every time they stopped for gas. With money running low, O'Brien decided to "just go until we hit ocean." That meant driving straight through the Ari-

zona desert in the dead of night.

"It was absolutely terrifying," he remembers. "I never got rid of that feeling of 'We're in the middle of nowhere and there's no help. If we break down, we're going to die. Either we're going to get eaten by animals or somebody out here is going to kill us.'"

Years later, O'Brien, who self-deprecatingly admits to having a "long and highly unremarkable" career in the Canadian film scene up until now, started writing the script that would become *Devil's Mile*. His original notion was to make an exploitation film "with crime and guns and girls, and we'll have it turn into a horror movie with monsters, and it will be great."

Indeed, while the movie is being marketed as a horror film, it is really a hybrid. Genre-savvy viewers will spot tributes to John Carpenter's *Prince of Darkness*, Mario Bava's *Rabid Dogs*, Tom Baker's *Doctor Who*, the Lovecraft mythos and J-horror. O'Brien says that diversity was

deliberate.

"I like stories that take the vocabulary of a horror movie and the vocabulary of the crime thriller and the vocabulary of a science fiction movie and kind of put them together. You get a different vibe and you can make less predictable choices as a result."

One choice that was perhaps predictable given his history is O'Brien's decision to give *Rue Morgue* staff members cameos in

a flashback sequence.

"The script called for a bunch of well-dressed miscreants, and I don't know a better group of well-dressed miscreants than the editorial staff of *Rue Morgue* magazine," he jokes. "It was a way of acknowledging where I came from. I've gone from being a horror fan to a horror journalist to a horror filmmaker, and that was just a way of acknowledging that."

*Devil's Mile* had its world premiere at Montreal's Fantasia film festival this summer before its release to DVD and VOD August 12. Meanwhile, O'Brien has begun writing another "blender" script that he describes as a "Philip K. Dick-style paranoid identity thriller with David Cronenberg overtones." Whether or not that ends up being his next film will depend on what opportunities present themselves in the wake of *Devil's Mile*'s release.

"Every time I've made something and thrown it into the world amazing doors open," O'Brien says. "And I hope that is true of this as well."





## REISSUES



## BABY BLU

## THE BABY (1973) Blu-ray

Starring Anjanette Comer, Ruth Roman and Mananna Hill  
Directed by Ted Post  
Written by Abe Polsky  
Severin

When I was a kid back in the early 1980s, I was introduced to one of the weirdest films my young brain had experienced up to that point: 1973's *The Baby*. To this day, it remains among the most offbeat, unsettling movies I've had the pleasure of seeing.

Compassionate social worker Ann Gentry (Anjanette Comer) has a new client: "Baby" (David Manzy), a fully grown man who wears diapers, sleeps in a crib and romps around in a playpen. Despite his childlike behaviour, Baby appears to be developmentally normal, physically speaking, and Ann begins to suspect that he has been forced to remain in an infantile state by his domineering mother Mrs. Wadsworth (Ruth Roman, *Strangers on a Train*) and his strange sisters Germaine (Mananna Hill, *Mesiah of Evil*) and Alba (Suzanne Zenor).

Though Mrs. Wadsworth – or "Mama," as she's referred to by everyone – is abnormally overprotective

of her son, her daughters use their brother to satiate their own sadistic and sexual desires. Alba likes to violently shock Baby with a cattle prod while Germaine has a habit of visiting his crib in the nude at night. When Ann tries to help Baby by suggesting he be placed in a day clinic for developmentally challenged youngsters, she faces resistance from the family. After she threatens to involve higher authorities, Mama and her daughters feign co-operation, but actually plan to bump her off. Unbeknownst to the trio, however, Ann has devised her own plans to liberate Baby from his playpen prison and will go to any length to do so – possibly even murder.



definition transfer. Bonus features include audio interviews (ported over from Severin's previous DVD release) with director Ted Post (*Beneath the Planet of the Apes*), who says that he tried to humanize the film's characters, and Manzy (a.k.a. David Mooney),

who reveals that he shaved his body to make himself appear more vulnerable. If you're an aficionado of fantastically far-out cinema, you owe it to yourself to spend some time with *The Baby*.

JAMES BURRELL

## TURNDOWN SERVICE

DEATH BED:  
THE BED THAT EATS (1977) Blu-ray

Starring Demane Hall, William Russ and Rosa Luxemburg  
Written and Directed by George Barry  
Cult Epics

There are films about humans, animals, insects, houses and even beaches "eating" people, but never a four-poster bed that lures, comforts, teases and then slowly consumes anything it can get its sheets around. But George Barry's *Death Bed* is no ordinary movie.

Sometimes confused with *Deathbed* (2002), a direct-to-video haunted bed/erotic shocker, Barry's 1977 film is a poetic fable that transcends the sometimes loopy narrative junctures, wobbly acting, minor gore and asps in technical continuity (the latter adding significantly to the film's dreamy quality).

Given sentence and an appetite for the other white meat of a demon in mourning, the bed is basically a Venus Flytrap, which ensnares and slowly digests, but unlike the plant, the large bed has a sense of humour and can move objects by will or through its "appendages" (sheets). It self-cleans after each kill to ensure the next foe sees nothing peculiar, but one can argue only peculiar minds would be comfortable spending the night in a perfectly preserved bed in a remote cabin's cellar.

One of its earliest victims, a panther, is literally trapped in the wall behind one of his sketches, and Barry uses the thoughts of this mute to eloquently recall, criticize and pontificate on the grievous events he's seen for perhaps a hundred years. It's only when the brother (William Russ, billed as Rusty Russ) of one of the bed's victims arrives does it realize it may have eaten one babe too many.

For a film conceived from a dream and directed by a first timer, *Death Bed* has great atmosphere, sometimes clever effects and evocative sound design. Shot between 1972 and 1974, Barry's film was never released, but due to a bootleg made from his 16mm answer print, it appeared on video throughout the world before its author decided to give it a legit release. In 2003, Cult Epics' 2014 HD transfer brings out the rich grain and colours from the sometimes rough – but never unwatchable – only surviving print, and the commentary track is filled with production details that fans of this surrealist oddity have likely been waiting to hear for years. Tuck in.

MARK R. HASAN





## FAILED FRANCO

### BLOODY MOON (1981) Blu-ray

Starring Olivia Pascal, Cristoph Moosbrugger and Nadja Gerganoff  
Directed by Jess Franco  
Written by Rayo Casablanca  
Severin

The late Jess Franco was not, in my opinion, a good director. But, when inspired, he could turn out work that was at least unique. Take 1971's *Vampyras Lesbos*, arguably his most interesting film. It both suffered and benefited from his obvious worship of actress/muse Soledad Miranda, but at least its mes-

meric cinematography and Miranda's scintillating sexuality made it great to look at.

*Bloody Moon* (1981), however, is product. A point Franco admits in the fascinating eighteen-minute interview that accompanies Severin's Blu-ray reissue of the film. Made to capitalize on the early

80s slasher film craze, this uncut version of the film cobbled together from a variety of prints of varying quality, benefits from Franco's penchant for sleaze (exploitative nudity, amateurish gore) but remains in-

coherent and badly acted (and dubbed). Worst of all, it's utterly dull.

Softcore star Olivia Pascal plays Angela, a new student at a Spanish school who finds herself stalked by the deformed Miguel (Alexander Waechter), whose sister Manuela (Nadja Gerganoff) helps run the school. Angela's classmates start meeting grisly ends one by one (a decapitation by stone saw is the most notorious kill), until she comes face to face with the killer. But is it Miguel? How about the deformed handyman? Do we care?

*Bloody Moon*'s incompetence is put into context by the aforementioned featurette, which originally appeared on Severin's 2008 DVD reissue. An unhealthy-looking Franco, who passed away last year, goes into detail about the travails of the production,

including being told that Pink Floyd had been signed to record the soundtrack (they hadn't) and that one of Hollywood's top special effects men had been hired (also false). Franco also claims to have had no input on the script, as it had been written by the film's production manager, who refused rewrites of any type.

Regardless as to how much of the film's quality can be attributed to factors beyond Franco's control, its reputation as a Video Nasty is mostly overstated, with the gore being as far from realism as possible. Additionally, many of the most potentially frightening moments are undone by humour that is sometimes black but more often lame. Call *Bloody Moon* a bloody mess and leave it at that.

SEAN PLUMMER



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THE

# LATE-NITE ARCHIVE

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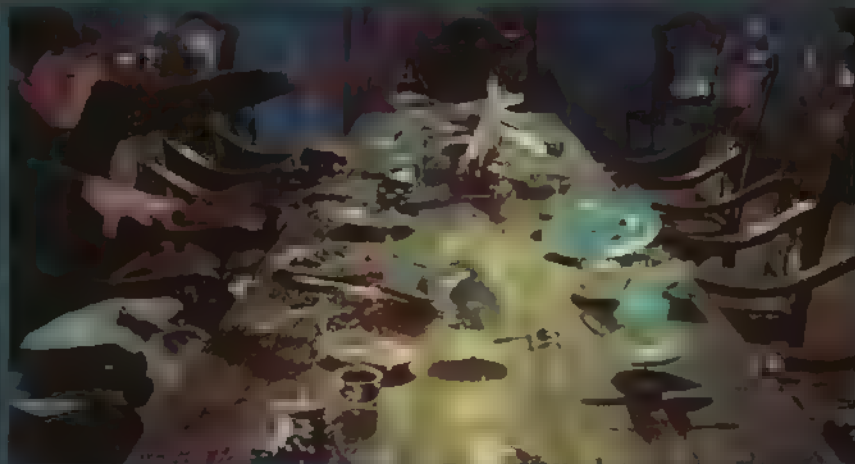
*A Hell House is Not a Home*

by Paul Corupe

**N**ever known for their commitment to realism, horror movies would have you believe that common objects such as mirrors, cars, buildings and children's toys are just waiting to spring to life and take bloody revenge on us. It's obviously true that strong emotions can affect your surroundings – we've all been in rooms that give off a bad vibe or felt uneasy around certain objects – but there have been few films that exploit this concept as well as John Hough's 1973 classic *The Legend of Hell House*. Out this month on Blu-ray from Shout Factory!, the film involves its titular estate becoming a sentient extension of its previous owner's sadistic and psychotic impulses. As the house terrorizes four intruders hoping to unlock its secrets, Hough gives it the illusion of life with the help of a pulsing soundtrack, clever camera angles and a minimalist lighting scheme. It's a technical masterpiece that establishes *The Legend of Hell House* as one of the most effective ghost films in horror history, alongside *The Uninvited*, *The Innocents* and *The Haunting*.

Based on a novel by Richard Matheson, who also penned the screenplay, the film has physicist Lionel Barrett (Olive Revill) spending a week in a shadowy mansion to see what he can discover about the truth behind life after death. Lionel brings along his wife, Ann (Gayle Hunnicutt), and mediums Florence (Pamela Franklin) and Ben (Roddy McDowall), the latter of whom was the only survivor of a previous attempt to exorcise the property. It's believed the debauched spirit of former inhabitant Emeric Belasco has infused the place with the evil energy of his favourite activities – “drug addiction, alcoholism, sadism, bestiality, mutilation, murder, vampirism, necrophilia, cannibalism, not to mention a gamut of sexual goodies,” notes Ben.

The researchers settle in but their attempts to contact Belasco put them in ever-increasing danger from flying dinnerware, falling mirrors, possessed cats and deadly ectoplasmic manifestations. A skeptic, Lionel tries to clear the



house's energy using technological devices, including a large computer-like machine, but the property's dark sexual history threatens to overtake the team's female contingent. Ann makes uncharacteristic aggressive advances towards Ben, while the repressed Florence is repeatedly attacked in her bedroom by an unseen force. As the researchers begin to flee the dwelling, fearing for their lives, it appears that no one will be able to put Belasco to rest.



*The Legend of Hell House* is a haunting (not just haunted), disturbing film, which includes one particularly memorable night scene, during which Ann awakens and notes a shadow on the wall, cast by one of the house's many statues. But then the shadow of the intertwined couple suddenly starts moving – actually having sex – complete with barely audible moaning. Did she hallucinate it, or was it the power of suggestion? It's a scene that illustrates what Hough and his crew are doing on a grander scale: using visual and aural tricks to make something seem alive that is clearly not. Likewise, in foggy establishing shots, cinematographer Alan Hume employs low angles to make the house imposingly tower over the researchers

while a lack of windows and the gloomy furniture make it feel ponderously large yet impenetrable, a place where any danger can emerge from the shadowy depths – and often does. No wonder Ben warns the others about the estate's temperament, asserting, “You do not fight this house! Hell House doesn't mind a guest or two. What it doesn't like is people who attack it.”

Perhaps most effective is the uneasy, pulsating electronic soundtrack, by Delia Derbyshire and Brian Hodgson, which underscores almost the entire running time of the film. The musicians, best known for their work on the iconic *Doctor Who* theme, punctuate the score with muffled voices and ghostly sexual moans that suggest that the manor itself is poised to collapse in some hedonistic fury of sexual abandon.

Making a house seem alive with evil is largely about the way that it is portrayed, and Hough pulls out the tricks in abundance to gleefully give us his own interplay of flickering shadows across the wall – or in this case, screen – to make *The Legend of Hell House* one of the most affecting ghost-themed works of the 1970s. Whether house, doll, book or puzzle box, films about suddenly animate objects with murderous intent continue to resonate strongly. And no wonder, as films about possessions that try to “possess” us may be the ultimate consumerist nightmare. ●





# IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT

**R**



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

## I Dream of Turtles by... Tal Zimerman

So this is it. Bowen's legendary basement. Dave wasn't kidding when he warned me to watch my step down here. The arrangement is precarious at best and lest I knock over the towering "to watch" pile, I should really heed my editor's words.

Somewhere near the bottom of the stack sits *The Bermuda Depths*, a made-for-TV oddity that, until very recently I had always referred to as "that weird dream I had as a kid: the one with the girl riding a giant turtle." It turns out that it wasn't a dream after all, but a 1978 telefilm that aired on ABC. I remembered it as a dream not only because I watched it while drifting in and out of sleep all those years ago (which is why I believed Benny Hill was an estranged uncle for so long) but also because the film itself seems to exist in an alternate reality. Or maybe an LSD trip...

It features Leigh McCloskey (of *Hamburger: The Motion Picture*, a film that deserves its own tribute, albeit in the pages of another publication) as a man haunted by a girl and her pet sea turtle who she rides like a Jet Ski into the ocean. Along for the adventure is his friend Eric (Carl Weathers, following up his breakthrough role in *Rocky*), a short-shorts-wearing marine biology student with a (thankfully figurative) hard-on for heavy weaponry. There's also Burl Ives as the proprietor of the ocean-side research facility Ives, when appearing as his human self will never not be trippy because all I (or many other children of the '70s) recall when he speaks is his character Sam the Snowman from the stop-motion animated *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* (1964). There's also reliable TV hottie



Connie Sellecca as the adult version of the turtle-riding apparition, and finally the *kaiju*-flavoured turtle itself, sometimes real other times (like when it's seen as the size of an armoured truck) stop-motion, but always hypnotic to the mind of a four-year-old. Now, if I told you all of that, you'd ask me what the hell I was smoking. And I'd happily share a toke, but nei-

ther of us would be any closer to figuring out if—in the words of Iron Maiden's Bruce Dickinson—what I saw that night was real and not just fantasy. We'd probably just giggle and order another pizza. Again.

The fact is, *The Bermuda Depths* is both real and fantasy. It's an American-Japanese co-production, with Rankin-Bass (creators of the aforementioned *Rudolph*, as well as a shit-ton of other stop-motion productions that enhanced/ruined your childhood) on producing and writing duties, and Tsubaraya Productions (the *Ultraman* franchise) handling the effects. This union in-

cludes director Tsugunobu Kotani, who was responsible for a few other equally weird TV movies, among them *The Last Dinosaur* (1977) and hard-to-find head-scratcher *The Ivory Ape* (1980) (His last IMDb credit is the 2000 horror film *Sototchi*, which he co-directed with Hideo Nakata of *Ringu* fame!).

Rediscovering *The Bermuda Depths* was an exhilarating experience, but not so much in the viewing, as a kid, you're gonna let some weird shit slide. As an adult, a jacked-up Carl Weathers in short shorts firing a bazooka harpoon into the shell of a monstrously overgrown turtle just ain't gonna fly, though the turtle itself does fly... sort of. No, the exciting part was simply verifying its existence. Just like the movie's main character, I was able to prove to others that what I had always thought was a weird dream was in fact, a reality. Though unlike McCloskey's troubled and lovelorn Magnus, I didn't have to lose my friends by the fury of a legendary sea beast and his ghostly commander for that to occur. I lost them to weird movies, mostly.

Thanks to Warner Archive Collection's DVD (available on their website), you can see for yourself what I've been smoking. Now get the hell out of Bowen's Basement before I tell you about that dream I had involving telekinetic powers and Willie Ames. ♥



**HALLOWEEN MAN**  
Drew Edwards  
and Sergio Calvet  
Monsterverse

**CLIVE BARKER'S  
NIGHT BREED #1**  
Clive Barker, Mark Andreyko  
and Piotr Kowalski  
BOOM!

**WAMPYRELLA #1**  
Nancy A. Collins and  
Patrick Berkenkotter  
Dynamite

**MONELLA AND THE  
MURDERS IN THE  
RUE MORGUE**  
Richard Corben  
Dark Horse

**THE DEAD QUEEN #1**  
Trey Brownfield and  
Pritz Cosens  
Dynamite

**SIR EDWARD GREY, WITCHFINDER:  
THE MYSTERIES OF UNLAND #1 OF 5**  
Kim Newman, Maura McHugh  
and Tyler Crook  
Dark Horse

# BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

Meet the hero who literally takes a bite out of crime: Halloween Man (a.k.a. Solomon Hitch) is a flesh-eating, scarred, undead monster who lives in Solar City, Texas, a metropolis filled with ghosts, werewolves, zombies and other assorted ghouls.

Created by Drew Edwards back in 1999, *Halloween Man* has haunted the internet as a cult-favourite web comic for over a decade. The title was recently relaunched through Monsterverse and online digital comics store comixology; it's still written by Edwards who is now joined by artist Sergio Calvet (*The Dark of the Forest*). The book has returned as both an ongoing title as well as a series of one-shots, making it easier than ever for readers to check out the character's monstrous appeal.

"I was extremely influenced by the Universal Monsters and wanted to make a monster that we could root for," says Edwards. "But he still had to be kind of off-putting. I feel like a lot of the 'monster-hero' types in comics soft-peddle the kinkier, weirder aspects to make the character more likable. Solomon might be a decent guy at heart, but it would still be terrifying to be in the same room as him."

Solomon was killed on Halloween night by a vampire but was (un)luckily resurrected by occult forces to fight evil. The experience left half of his body permanently scarred but bestowed upon him enhanced strength as well as the ability to take a licking and keep on ticking. So far the new series has seen him tackle killer dwarfs, a succubus, a cannibal witch doctor, the invisible Man and a memorable crossover with Image's *Hack/Slash*.

Despite the carnage, *Halloween Man* is a contagiously fun book, nicely straddling horror with humour, romance and superhero smackdowns.

"We've created a world where we can jump around a lot between genres but it all still fits together," explains Edwards. "The characters exist in

a world that isn't our own, but more of an alternate world formed by pop culture. So, with something like the *Halloween Man vs. the Invisible Man* special, we can do a bas-out Gothic horror. But we can jump over to something like the current "Eye of the Beholder" arc, which has more of a retro sci-fi/weird science vibe. But hopefully they both still feel like they exist in the same universe."

There's no doubt, however, that the fuel in *Halloween Man*'s engine is horror. Edwards has been a staunch horror fan since childhood and proudly displays his love of the genre.

"I've loved a lot of the films that have come out over the last decade or so, but the stuff I always reach back to is the stuff I grew up on," he says. "I love the Universal Gothics, I love '50s sci-fi, I love gonzo '80s horror films. In the book we pay homage to everything from Ray Harryhausen fantasy epics to '80s splatterpunk movies."

Joining Edwards is artist Sergio Calvet, whose striking artwork made a strong impression on us earlier this year on *The Dark of the Forest* [RM#141]. His almost whimsical pencils belie the more horrific goings-on: at least, until the blood and guts start flying.

"The gorier the better, I don't back up a single bit!" says Calvet. "Those scenes tend to be the highlight of Drew's story so he always gives them plenty of room to shine – and plenty of space for me to fill. He gives them splash pages and big broad panels in which I can add all the bits, fluids and organs I feel necessary. I have a lot of fun drawing them."

And it's a good thing Calvet enjoys the mayhem because it sounds like there's plenty of chaos to come.

"We have a giant, sprawling story arc called



*Halloween Man's titular hero gets some sand and sun*

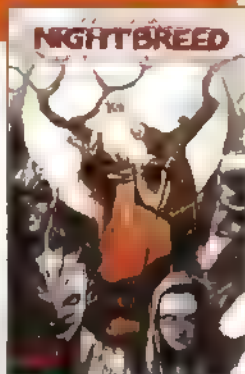
"The Terrible Fruit Bats," which is about mutant vampires," reveals Edwards. "Vampires within the *Halloween Man* universe have very specific rules and are presented almost like supernatural Nazis. But these mutated vamps break a lot of those rules. They're very fun to play with. Plus, it was an excuse to build a sort of mini Hammer horror world within the existing *Halloween Man* world. So, there are castles, giant crosses, lots of cobblestones, etc. Visually, it's a lot of fun and Sergio outdid himself on the art."

Check out *Halloween Man* on comixology and keep up with updates at [halloweenmancomics.blogspot.ca](http://halloweenmancomics.blogspot.ca).

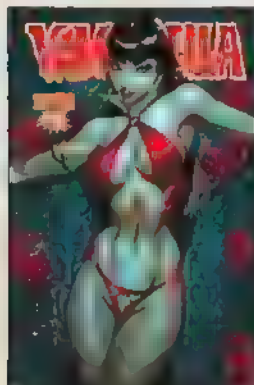
FOLLOW PEDRO ON TWITTER @PCABEZUELO



**Clive Barker returns** to M dian with a *Night Breed* series that chronicles the new exploits of his misshapen and monstrous group of misfits. The debut issues tell parallel tales, one set in 1857 Louisiana and the other in 1945 Boston. In Louisiana, a black couple is on the run in the swamps and bump into tentacle-headed Pequin, who has his own plans for the female of the pair. Meanwhile, in Boston, a prominent senator dabbles at the local cathouse with its prized femme: the quilled Shuna Sassi. The series appears to be providing some background on two of the most memorable creatures from the film, and it's a welcome revisiting that won't confuse anyone unfamiliar with Barker's original stories. Andreyko's script moves fast and Kowalski's art does a solid job of transferring the characters from screen to page. A strong start.



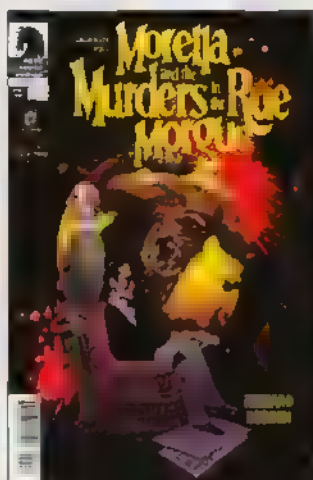
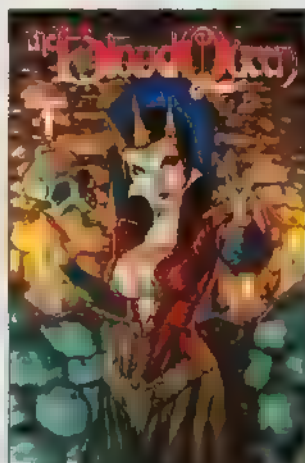
**The titular vamp** is called in when a little girl is kidnapped by her possessed father and scheduled to be sacrificed in a satanic ritual. Will Vamprella rescue the child in time, or is there a far more sinister game being played? Horror writer Nancy A. Collins provides some good twists in what could have been a fairly



straightforward tale and even manages to bring back an old Vamprella adversary. This shouldn't deter new readers, however, as it's very easy to pick up the essentials without having to read a single Vamprella story published in the past 45 years. Berkenkotter's art captures the character's look without being exploitative – always a challenge – and handles the gorier aspects with style. Overall, a great set-up that kicks off a promising storyline.

**Adapting two Poe stories** in one 26-page comic is no mean feat but Richard Corben has certainly proven he's more than capable [See *RM#145*]. Up next are "Morella," a bizarre tale of familial reincarnation, and one of the

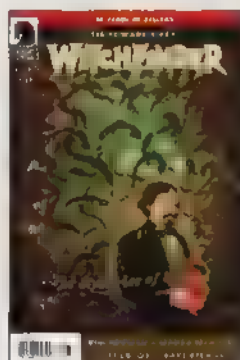
worst kept mysteries, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Both adaptations manage to capture the essence of Poe's stories while taking a handful of liberties, more so in the case of "Morella." As far as pacing goes, "Murders" comes across as an abridged version of the original tale yet still hits the most important beats. Needless to say, Corben's art is exceptional, and well worth any deviation from the source material.



**Inspired by** real-life Blood Queen Elizabeth Bathory, this new series seems more interested in using the legendary Countess' story as an eventual jumping off point, rather than for a literal retelling. So we meet a young Elizabeth in some medieval country, where she's an apprentice to the witch Winifred. When Elizabeth is called upon to tend to the King's ailing baby, she's granted access to the court, where she uncov-

ers a hidden evil and also gives birth to her own secret plans. Whatever connections to the Bathory legend this book has remain to be seen, but for now it begins the saga on a strong note, with plenty of intrigue and a decent assortment of characters, most of which appear to be following their own agendas. Fritz Casas' art is great and manages to deal with *The Blood Queen's* sordid elements in a nicely restrained way – at least for now.

**What a welcome** return to the world of Victorian occult-hunter Sir Edward Grey. While investigating a mysterious murder in Hallam, our hero hears about Unland, the nearby wetlands, which some say is home to terrible creatures. Soon, Grey must plumb the depths of the mystery or risk drowning in a sea of unanswered questions. *The Mysteries of Unland* mines its Victorian setting for maximum effect, and Tyler Crook's art fits nicely within the M gnoiverse, perfectly alluding to drawing room mysteries yet still able to smoothly work in the more fantastical monster elements.



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## THE GIRL WITH ALL THE GIFTS

M R Carey  
Orbit

*The Girl With All the Gifts* makes no secret of the fact that it was penned by a popular comics/horror writer (Mike Carey: *The Unwritten*) using a thinly veiled pseudonym. The big question is why release it like this with that decidedly un-horror cover? *Girl* certainly doesn't deserve to be dumped unceremoniously onto bookstore shelves. Rather, it should be screamed about from the rooftops, as it's that rare zombie novel that even after a ten-year deluge of zombie novels feels inventive – and more than a little exciting.

Unlike many undead yarns, *Girl* does not muck around in the early days of the outbreak (presented here as a parasitic infection that commandeers the brains and bodies of its victims). Instead, it sets its clock for a generation later when the last hold-outs of humanity are either military enclaves still experimenting on the "hungries," in hopes of finding a cure, or are tattered "junkers" using the infected as weapons of mass destruction (to get at the people and supplies housed at the army bases). But it's not just humans who have evolved as time has passed. Child hungries are showing a surprising aptitude to learn and feel, unlike the older infected. Are they the key to mankind's survival? Scientist Caroline Caldwell certainly thinks so.

But *Girl* is not her story so much as it is Melanie's tale. Melanie is a young hungry who has been captured for the purpose of experimentation and eventual non-sedated dissection, something she becomes aware of in the most heart-rending of ways. Spared only because she finds an ally in one of the teachers at the base, she becomes pivotal when a small group of survivors are driven into the wilds after a junker attack.

*Girl* succeeds at being both a sympathetic zombie story, as well as a

truly terrifying one – not because of the flesh-hungry former humans, but because of the other ways the parasite is evolving to ensure its world domination. The final quarter of the book, set in the ruins of London, England, presents imagery best described as pure nightmare fuel.

In the beginning it's easy to dismiss the survivors as stock character types, but like the story itself, they change as the true horror of what the world is faced with sinks in. *The Girl With All the Gifts* is the closest thing yet to a next-gen zombie yarn, and is highly recommended to anyone who thought shamblers had nowhere new left to stumble.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

THE CHILDREN OF OLD LEECH:  
A TRIBUTE TO THE CARNIVOROUS  
COSMOS OF LAIRD BARRON

Ross E. Lockhart and Justin Steele, eds.

Word Horde

It's good to be Laird Barron these days. This year he received the Bram Stoker Award for best collection, he got tapped to be the editor of *Year's Best Weird Fiction, Volume One* (see p.50), and now this: horror's cream of the crop paying respect to his mythos in a tribute anthology. Quite a success for someone whose first book was published only seven years ago.

Barron has taken the horror world by storm, and *The Children of Old Leech* is another testament to the imprint he's left with his vaguely Lovecraftian, but much more testosterone-filled, carnivorous cosmos. Some of the most prominent modern practitioners of quality horror are gathered here to stretch the mythology of Barron's oeuvre, and the result is a surprisingly consistent lineup of excellent tales. Since Barron has proven himself a master of the novelette form, it's no big surprise that the very best stories in *The Children of Old Leech* are the longer ones.

Stellar among them

are "Ymir," by John Langan with its concept of a world-sized god-monster revealed at an abandoned base in the Arctic; "Pale Apostle" by Jesse Bullington and J T Glover, a wonderfully atmospheric tale tinged with Chinese mythology; and "Love Songs From the Hydrogen Jukebox" in which T. E. Grau shows how unwise it is to search for knowledge up the Devil's Mountain in a sect like community worshipping a Hindu "Holy Man." Also notable: Michael Griffin's "Firedancing," about an initiation ritual at a secluded ultra-rich guy's villa, and "Tenebrionidae," by Scott Nicolay (RM#145) and Jesse James Douthitt Nicolay, a juicy tale filled with imaginative chills concerning a sect of occultist train-riding gutter punks chasing a young man who has an important book they want back.

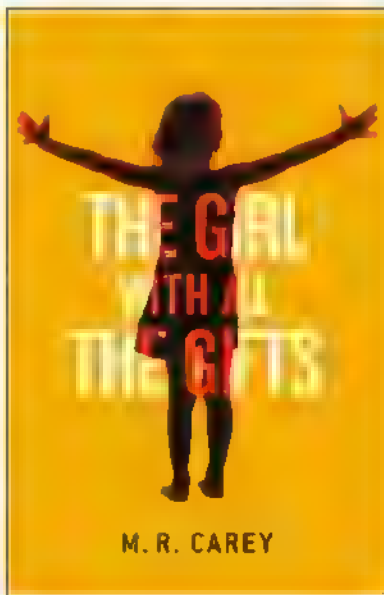
Gemma Files, Paul Tremblay, Joseph S. Pulver Sr. and Daniel Mills (RM#144) also contribute strong stories, but in an anthology so uniformly great, there's no way you can go wrong. *The Children of Old Leech* brings horrific joy from start to finish. Barron will be proud.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

FOUND FOOTAGE HORROR FILMS:  
FEAR AND THE APPEARANCE OF  
REALITYAlexandra Heller-Nicholas  
McFarland

With genre fans getting burned out on first-person POV movies, Alexandra Heller-Nicholas' survey of found-footage films comes in the nick of time, although even she admits that a few years may have to pass before the subgenre's place in horror history can be properly assessed.

The Australian academic's work understandably revolves around the genre's two best-known films of this ilk: *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Paranormal Activity* (2007). But where most musings on these movies' origins begin with 1980's *Cannibal Holocaust*, Heller-







Found Footage Horror Films: [Rec]

Nicholas goes much further back. Specifically, she cites Orson Welles' infamous 1938 *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast (which panicked thousands of listeners across America into believing that Martians were really invading) and the American safety films of the '50s and '60s (which elaborated on topics such as car safety in often gruesome ways) as found footage's more distant ancestors.

From there, Heller Nicholas dissects the genre in film, and on TV and online, placing a special emphasis on sexual politics and what her fellow Australian Barbara Creed called the "monstrous-feminine" in relation to female horror characters. Heller Nicholas persuasively argues that found footage, like much of horror, defines femaleness as either monstrous (think: the unseen crone of the *Blair Witch*) or subject to male control (the camera-wielding men of the *Paranormal Activity* films). The technology of found footage, she argues, is an

## GRIM READER



### THE UNTOLD TALES OF OZMA BROOM

Robin Spriggs  
Anomalous Books

This collection of short stories and poems is supposedly written by, about the fictional character of Ozma Broom, a mysterious individual whose work of

demonology, sorcery, and the occult is fleshed out through both the stories and the extensive footnotes left in the margins. A hard-to-describe yet highly entertaining compilation, *The Untold Tales of Ozma Broom* is an experience in fiction fans should not pass up.

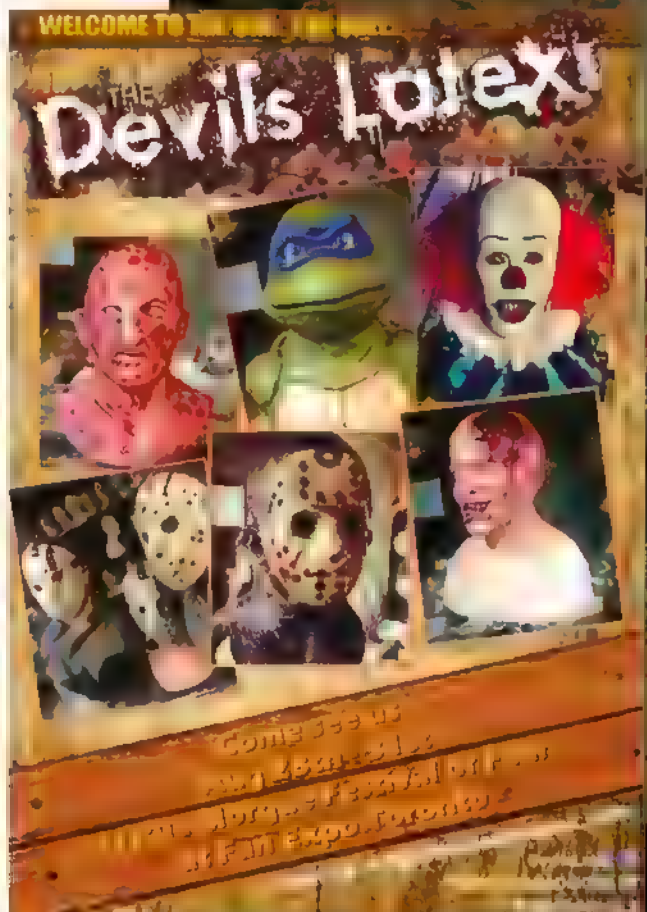


### WATCH US DIE

David Bernstein  
Samhain

David Bernstein's *Watch Us Die* attempts to breathe life into tired ghost-story clichés with *Watch Us Die* is a book about a group of teens that

returns to the titular locale despite its legendary curse to become subject to a stale and predictable revenge doled out by a wrathful spirit. Reading more like a B-script than a well-thought-out novel, *Watch Us Die* is a pass.



WEIRD FICTION HAS CRAWLED BACK INTO THE HORROR LIT LIMELIGHT.  
IT CONTINUES ITS ASCENT WITH A NEW ANTHOLOGY SERIES

# STAYING STRANGE

BY DEJAN OGNJANOVIC

**T**HE WORLD OF HORROR IS ABOUT TO GET A WHOLE LOT WEIRDER WITH THE RELEASE OF THE INAUGURAL VOLUME OF THE ANTHOLOGY SERIES *YEAR'S BEST WEIRD FICTION THIS MONTH*.

Published by Undertow Publications, each book will be edited by a different dignitary in the field; this year the honour went to Bram Stoker Award-winning writer Laird Barron (*RM#132*). It's a testament to the renewed interest in weird fiction, spurred on by the likes of Octavia Butler, Neil Gaiman, John Langan, Thomas Ligotti, China Miéville, the publication of anthologies such as *American Fantastic Tales* and *The Weird*, and journals such as *Shadows & Tall Trees* and *Weird Fiction Review*. Authors selected for the first volume include some of those mentioned, as well as Richard Gavin, Livia Llewellyn, Scott Nicolay and Simon Strantzas (*RM#143*).

"Weird fiction is here to stay," says Michael Kelly, editor/publisher at Undertow. "Once the purview of esoteric readers, it is enjoying wider popularity. [Yet] throughout its storied history there has not been a dedicated volume of the year's best weird writing."

Until now.

But what exactly is "the weird," and how close to horror does it hew? In his introduction, Barron attempts to define the nebulous subgenre: "My sense of a weird tale is that it contravenes reality in some essential manner; that it possesses at least a hint of the alien; and that it emanates disquiet or disorientation. ... When there's a sense of dislocation from mundane reality, the suspension of the laws of physics, an inversion or subversion of order. ... Weird stories hit a different register than other genres. There's the experience of frisson, but it's a different thrill than the variety I receive from a good horror tale."

He admits, however, that the distinction is pretty much personal, and based more on his feeling than on unyielding definitions. H.P. Lovecraft used the term "weird tale," while others, such as Robert Aickman, preferred "strange stories." None of them bothered to attempt to distinguish a *weird* story from a *horror* story.

"Weird fiction usually overlaps with other genres," Barron explains. "In this old Conan and John Carter of Mars takes it intersected with pulp adventure. Jack Vance and Michael Shea backstopped the weird with science fiction and fantasy. Stephen Graham Jones uses crime and noir while Llewellyn mixes it with erotica and horror. The key is intent."

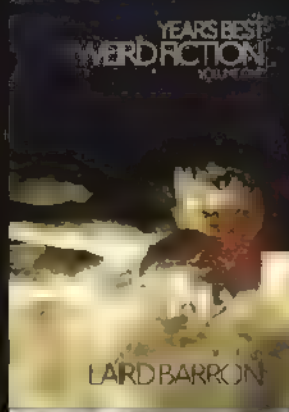
For the book, Barron needed to distinguish great weird stories from those that are just decent. Fortunately his recent stint as a juror for the Shirley Jackson Awards intensified and broadened the scope of his reading. While auditioning works for the anthology, he received a glut of anthologies, novels and collections — in addition to keeping his thumb on the genre's pulse via Facebook, speculative fiction website Locus Online and similar places.

"I went after all kinds of stories," Barron admits. "Many, many of them by veteran writers published by veteran editors. I read widely. Really, it boiled down to the personal. I'm a fan of masterwork classic fiction. If a story resonated with me anywhere on the same spectrum as Robert E. Howard, Lovecraft, Shea, Shirley Jackson, Jorge Luis Borges, Aickman, Kelly Link or Aimee Bearnier, it went into the finalist pile. Whittling down from there was agonizing. We could have easily done another volume with the honorable mentions."

Not surprisingly, weird tales have evolved since their birth in the pulp era into a much darker brew, as evidenced by the stories in *Year's Best Weird Fiction*. The decay of desolate towns affects the psyche of troubled characters in Llewellyn's "Furnace" and Nicolay's "Eyes Exchange Bank"; reality of the world is questioned briefly, during a massive storm that offers a glimpse into the beyond, in John Langan's "Bor Urus"; and the number of steps on a staircase in an otherwise normal-looking house just won't add up in "The Nineteenth Step" by

Strantzas. Reason is helpless here, and there are no easy answers — or happy endings.

It's something Barron is not blind to, as he observes rather astutely: "Writers seem more angry these days. Miserablism and pessimism reign supreme. The internal world of characters receives more attention. There's also far more preoccupation with message and technique than story. Not much of the best writing is bare-knuckle." ♦





## Found Footage Horror Films



FEAR and the  
APPEARANCE of REALITY

Alexandra Heller-Nicholas

fans and always intriguing, something we wish we could say about most found-footage horror films.

SEAN PLUMMER

## THE HOUSE WHERE EVIL LURKS: A PARANORMAL INVESTIGATOR'S MOST FRIGHTENING ENCOUNTER

Brandon Callahan  
Llewellyn

Real-life ghost stories are a hard pill to swallow for some of us. Even for believers, there's often a need for a photograph or an audio recording to back up tales of otherworldly encounters. The story alone is rarely enough to inspire fear or belief, which is unfortunately the major downfall of Brandon Callahan's *The House Where Evil Lurks*.

Callahan is a paranormal investigator and this book follows his real-life account of a case he worked in southern Missouri. Over the course of several months, Callahan and his crew performed a series of investigations within a home that was supposedly haunted by a number of spirits. The house itself has a colourful history involving a mysterious disappearance and a former incarnation as a funeral home. Callahan and his team experience several different types of paranormal phenomenon, including slamming doors and disembodied footsteps, and they allegedly make contact with a few of the spirits that dwell there.

While this was certainly a landmark case for those involved, the excitement the investigators must have felt doesn't exactly translate to the page, whether or not you believe in ghosts, without any sort of tangible evidence, the story alone doesn't make for a very compelling read. This is largely due to poor pacing, as each supernatural occurrence is explained in great detail. While important from an investigative standpoint, it takes some of the edge off in terms of scare factor. There's also a lot of information regarding Callahan's personal background and beliefs that make this read more like a journal than a scary story.

Readers looking for a new haunted house tale to keep them up at night won't find it here, as the tone of the book seems aimed more towards an audience of like-minded paranormal investigators than actual horror fans. At the same time, seasoned researchers won't find much new here either, but they may still enjoy the chance to follow a haunting probed by one of their peers.

MIKE BEARDSALL



## LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

I have often vehemently complained that film and television tend to overlook the treasure trove of original tales found in literature. Fresh monster fare is just sitting on bookstore shelves waiting to be brought to life on screen, it just needs to be optioned, funded and adapted.

Well, be careful what you wish for.

Don't get me wrong, it's still exciting that virtually every week there's a new announcement of some great book being picked up for film or TV (most recently, Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*, by the Starz network). This is, after all, what I wanted. But I also want the adaptations to be sincere and good – and how close enough to their source material to be recognizable. But for every *Game of Thrones* or *John Dies At the End*, there are equally big missteps.

I watched my favourite book in Charlaine Harris' *Southern Vampire Mysteries* series butchered in the fourth season of *True Blood*, a show that lost its way the further it diverged from the text to become the almost unwatchable mess it is now: a hodgepodge of graphic sex and characters that fail to evolve in any meaningful way. Similarly, the relatively dark coming-of-age tale of friendship, vampire lore/politics and spell magic that is the 2007 young adult novel *Vampire Academy* (by Richelle Mead), became a vapid, disposable paranormal comedy in the hands of Hollywood, which needlessly injected it with too many lame, quickly dated pop culture references, underdeveloped character motivations and a heroine who is almost the polar opposite of her paperback counterpart (lithe and lovely vs. brash and busty). This heroine problem spills over into Space's adaptation of Kelley Armstrong's 2001 werewolf novel *Bitten*. The book is engaging in large part because main character Elena is a relatable everywoman doing her best under extraordinary circumstances (read: bitten by a werewolf). Her TV version meanwhile is an ultra-thin, ultra-pretty, ultra-successful blonde with a rich boyfriend who travels in (yawn...) upper-class circles. She's not the type of woman most of us can see ourselves in, nor the type it is easy to believe would fight – and when necessary, torture – monsters.

Of course, changes are necessary when novels are repackaged into TV or movies, but the studios seem to forget what made these books bestsellers in the first place, and making too many core changes, particularly to the main characters, strips them of their power/accessibility – and that's something that just can't be replaced, no matter how smokin' hot the performers may be or how much mayhem and gore are thrown into the mix.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



# FRIGHT GALLERY

CURATED BY GARY POLLIN

## THIS MONTH: HER COLOURS OF THE DARK

If you're going to adopt the name of what is arguably Dario Argento's most garish and popular film, you'd better have an eye for colour and no fear of blood. *Suspiria*, a Toronto-based painter, dollmaker and tattoo artist, has both. The Spanish artist attended art school in Barcelona with the intent of becoming a fashion designer, but wound up earning a degree in illustration and graphic design. Years later, she moved to Toronto, met her tattoo teacher (and later husband) at his shop, and has been turning heads with her colourful and macabre artwork ever since.

"My style is pretty dark and bloody but I still try to keep it as elegant and soft as I can," she explains. "I also specialize in female anatomy, so even at my darkest, my style is still very feminine. ... I love everything dark and nightmarish but beautiful at the same time."

She learned her ink chops from well-known European tattoo artists David Alex Alexander (Denmark), Gunnar Foley (Sweden) and Enako (Spain), and cites as additional influences Paul Acker, Nikko Hurtado and Erin

Chance, as well as painters Camille Rose Garcia, Chet Zar and Mark Ryden.

Growing up in Spain during the '80s, she was introduced to the genre by her parents.

"My mom and dad are big horror fans; one of my earliest memories is actually watching the first *Phantasm*. I was four years old! My parents used to pause the movies to explain to me how everything was fake and fun, and to ask me if I wanted to keep watching or if it was getting too scary."

Her mix of eye-popping colour and a softer aesthetic is best exemplified in her doll- and pin-up-like female figures in various spooky and/or bloody states. Yet, she's also skilled at more realistic black and white portraits, such as her takes on *Vampira* and *Frankenstein's monster*. That said, when asked if there's a certain tattoo she's aching to do, the answer is no surprise.

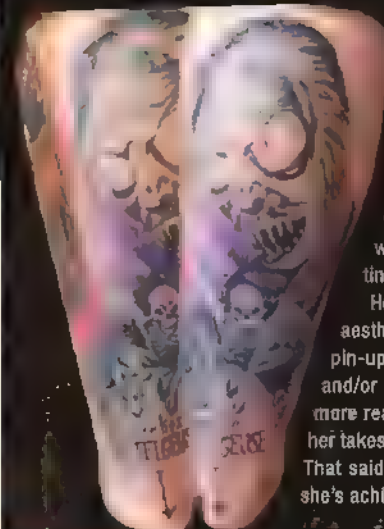
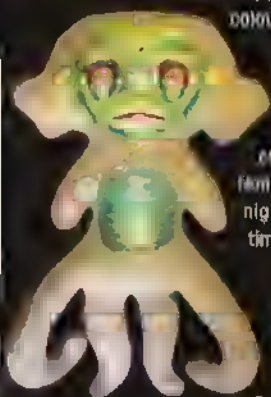


"I would definitely love to do anything related to Dario Argento's movies, from *Suspiria* to *Inferno*," she says. "Maybe a *Phenomena* tattoo of Jennifer Connelly with her insects around her – that would be a dream!"

In addition to a busy tattoo schedule, *Suspiria* makes time to paint, sculpt and create toys. Recently, she created a line of hand-painted plush dolls called *Terror Tots*, and is working towards creating her own clothing line.

"My aspiration as an artist is to explore new mediums, such as horror movie prosthetics and special effects makeup, and to keep making a living with my art."

You can meet *Suspiria* at this year's Festival of Fear and see more of her work at [suspiriaand.tumblr.com](http://suspiriaand.tumblr.com).







# THE GORE-MET

MENU: GORE-MET SAMPLES THE SOUREST OF TASTES

**I**f there is one genre of exploitation films that came out in the 1970s and 1977 remain largely unrivaled, it's sadiconazis. You've yet to delve into the sadiconazis. Severin Films, through its Intervention sub-label, recently released two of the more notable titles in the cycle.

But first some history: While the key considerations in the originator of this particular exploitation sub-genre is American — Leo Frost's *Love Camp 7* (1969) — and the most inflamed is Canadian — *Isa, She Wolf of the SS* (1975) — the key influences on the Italian filmmakers were in fact three Italian art house films: Luciano Visconti's *The Damned* (1969), Liliana Cavanini's *The Night Ravens* (1974) and Tinto Brass' *Emily* (1976).

The first of our Severin releases, *Report on the Reported Women of the SS Special Section* (1977), is an Austrian noblewoman (Lina Polito) sent, during the waning days of the war, to a transition camp where prisoners were held before being dispatched to labour camps or brothels — after being caught by the Gestapo with her lover, a partisan fighter. To make matters worse, she spurned the romantic overtures of the sadistic camp commandant, Sturmbannführer Erner (John Steiner), before the war. Erner sets about breaking her stoicism in a jigsaw-puzzle bid to win her affection, while the Allies advance ever closer.

This is a relentlessly grim film, devoid of the over-the-top nonsense of later entries such as *The Beast in Heat* (1977). The exploitive elements, mainly the rampant nudity and lesbian trysts, are joyless, as they're presented within the context of an accurate depiction of prison camp life (i.e., they're humiliating and forced). Even the best gore gag, in which the head guard bashes a prisoner's skull in with a truncheon for trying to escape, is utterly depressing. The saving grace in this is Steiner's calculated consumption of the scenery; his gleefully evil performance is only bested by Malcolm McDowell in *Caligula* (1979).

This marks the first proper DVD release of *Reported Women of the SS Special Section*; Video City released it on VHS in 1985, which was the source for the BCI/Eclipse DVD double bill with *Escape from*



*Women's Prison* (1978), and Full Moon released a dubious non-anamorphic version, minus the opening credit sequence, as part of their Grindhouse Collection last year. The Severin disc is anamorphic, with the credit sequence sourced from VHS. Extras include an informative 36-minute overview of Nazisploitation titled *A Brief History of Sadiconazis*, a half-hour interview with Di Sivestro and a hilariously unapologetic nine-minute interview with Steiner.

Conversely, Severin's other Nazisploitation re-release, Cesare Canevari's *Gestapo's Last Orgy* (1977), is arguably the most offensively ridiculous film in this cycle. The plot was shamelessly stolen from *The Night*

*Porter* — years after the war, a former "lieben camp" (military brothel) commandant, Conrad von Starker (Marco Lucif), reunites with the Jewish woman, Lise (Daniela Levy), he had a sadomasochistic relationship with in the now-derelict camp. Their "romance" is revealed in shockingly tasteless flashbacks.

In an early scene, von Starker lectures a squadron of naked soldiers about the nature of the Jewish race while showing them slides of one woman eating from a dog bowl while a man takes her roughly from behind and another

joins in with a gang rape!

As in the previous film, von Starker is obsessed with a resolute prisoner and works at breaking her down mentally to gain her devotion. He subjects her to a variety of psychological tortures, including hanging her upside down and naked over a tank full of hungry rats. He demonstrates their voracity by sticking his hand into what's actually a pack of cats.

And then there's the notorious dinner scene, in which von Starker and a coterie of Nazis talk about Aryan supremacy and the glory of the Third Reich while dining on... falafels! Then they flambé a prisoner in a coffin full of cognac (pictured above) to seal the deal. It tastes like! This film would be utterly reprehensible were it not for its



*Gestapo's Last Orgy* has been no stranger to home video. Magnum Video released it on VHS as *Caligula Reincarnated as Hitler* in 1991. That was recycled by Alternative Cinema on VHS in 2001 and on DVD, double billed with *White Slave* (1985), in 2004. Media Blasters released a non-anamorphic version that included an Italian language track with no subtitles in 2006. This latest disc is anamorphic and English-only. A theatrical trailer and the Nazisploitation featurette are included as extras. An eye-wash station, unfortunately, is not.

# AUDIO DROME

★★★★  
DROBLY

★★★★  
BURNERKIS

★★★★  
BECENT

★★★★  
BULL

★★★★  
BIVEL

★★★★  
BOR  
BEND ON  
BURNING

REVIEWS BY MARK R. HASAN, AARON VON JUPITON, GEORGE PACHECO,  
SEAN PLUMMER, JON STEFFENS AND GLENN TILSON



## THE WALKING DEAD Original Soundtrack Vol. 1

SPACE LAB 9

The mainstream officially gets on the vinyl bandwagon with Space Lab 9's *Walking Dead Original Soundtrack Vol. 1* released on CD just a month earlier. Fans expecting to hear series composer Bear McCreary's anxiety-inducing score will be disappointed however, as this first volume contains only a butchering, er, remix of the main title theme, then surrounds it with seven songs that appeared in the third season. Not exactly comprehensive! The album attempts to showcase the variety of original music that has appeared in the show while capturing its apocalyptic essence and to be fair, it mostly works. "The Parting Glass" by Lauren Cohan and Emily Kinney (who play sisters Maggie and Beth Greene) is positively haunting while contributions by Jamie N. Commons and Delta Spirit have the bluesy twang of *Walking Dead*'s gory western narrative. Space Lab 9 has issued limited runs on "black smoke," "blood red" and "zombie flesh green" vinyl, though you may wish to wait for a more accurate release of the show's music. **AVL** ★★



## ESCAPE FROM L.A. John Carpenter and Shirley Walker

LA-LA LAND RECORDS

Perhaps more disappointing than the film was *Escape From L.A.*'s original soundtrack release, in which the muscular score was hacked down to the

old LP running time of around a half-hour ruining the narrative of this perfect collaboration between John Carpenter and Shirley Walker (*Memoirs of an Invisible Man*). La-La Land's CD restores the length of shortened cues, plus it adds unreleased and unused material. What emerges is a highly thematic score that frequently moves from light orchestra to percussion tracks bursting with tribal rage ("The Broadcast / The Coliseum"). It's a perfect evocation of a murderous cult living in the once pretty environs of L.A. The sound's also more robust—better for the bass-pounding action cues, bass drones and electronic detailing—and it's a treat to hear Carpenter's themes spun into beautifully orchestrated variations by the late, great Walker. A perfect, long-deserved restoration. **MRH** ★★★★★



## DAVID YOW

Tonight You Look Like a Spider

JIVE NASTY

Musican/actor David Yow—best known for fronting seminal noise-rockers The Jesus Lizard—recently saw two careers collide when he played an exorcist in the horror film *Upsidedown Cross*, while contributing the track "Visualize This" to the score, a song that also appears here on his first solo album. Unlike many solo projects, there's no mistaking the sound of *Spider* for that of The Lizard. Slashing guitars are almost entirely replaced by keys, be it those of a piano, synthesizer or computer (the album was largely assembled on ProTools) making this feel like a collaboration between Claudio Smonetti and noise pioneer William Bennett. Yes, there's some heavy riffing on "Bleth My Thoul," but the album owes more to the skittering jazz of mid-'70s Goblin and the eerily tribal synth drones of Bennett's Cut Hands project. "The Door" even directly recalls the piercing

tones of Bennett's previous outfit, Whitehouse. *Spider* functions best as a faux-soundtrack, and a deeply unsettling one at that. **GT** ★★★★★



## POWERMAN 5000 Builders of the Future

T-BOY RECORDS/UMC

Whereas older brother Rob Zombie infuses his music with horror, Michael David Cummings (a.k.a. Spider One) fuels Powerman 5000 with sci-fi and comic books. Fifteen years after the release of his breakthrough album, *Tonight the Stars Revolt!*, Spider looks to recapture his late '90s robot rock glory with album number seven, *Builders of the Future*. The record kicks off in fine form with the high-energy "Invade Destroy Repeat," a chugging, juggernaut of guitars and anthem-c choruses that is essentially repeated eight times over the course of the album, with only the acoustic death rock of "I Want to Kill You" to slow down the proceedings. With this record, Spider One turns his talent to creating industrial

metal anthems that could ring out in stadiums—even though they will probably only be performed in dingy nightclubs. Kudos though, for his carpe diem attitude, exemplified on "Live It Up Before You're Dead," in which Spider proclaims "We're bringing motherfucking bombs to a fuckin' knife fight." Bring it! **MRH** ★★★★★



## DEFEND HAMILTON EAT SHIT

Various

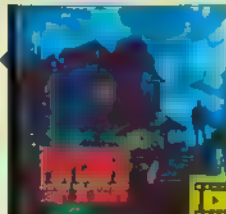
SCHIZOPHRENIC RECORDS

Around *Rue Morgue*'s home of Toronto, we just can't help thumbing our noses a bit at Hamilton, our steel-town cousin located 45 minutes down the road. However, if this 7-inch compilation of eight hardcore bands paying tribute to Hammer City's underbelly teaches us anything, it's that maybe we should. This is ugly source material for bands making ugly noise. At What Cost's contribution details the crimes of Jon Rallo, a city hall manager who murdered his wife and children. Laid to Rest sings

## PSYCHO II Jerry Goldsmith

INTRADA SPECIAL COLLECTION

The concept of a rehabilitated serial killer returned to society was a novel approach in *Psycho II*, an unnecessary but okay sequel that benefitted heavily from Jerry Goldsmith's main theme about a lost childhood and Norman Bates' inner clash between a juvenile yearning for affection and the trigger mechanisms within his old home. Goldsmith's palette was still mostly orchestral around 1983 and as in *Twilight Zone: The Movie* there are plenty of theme deconstructions and shock stabs, but it's the maternal dealing with Bates' inner demons gaining control that makes the score. Goldsmith creates almost liquid undercurrents of alternating tones, drones and swirling motifs like a recurring bell-chime/piano strike that imparts a sense of plunging into darkness. With Intrada's beautifully mastered CD doubling the score's length, the dramatic progressions (with fleeting Herrmann motifs) are more precise, highlighting Bates' losing battle to start anew. **MRH** ★★★★★





# LISTEN TO MY NIGHTMARE

**P**sycho Charger refuses to be confined to the crate of horror rock. For the uninitiated, this LA-based trio has been combining rockabilly, punk, surf, goth and even industrial for fifteen years now, to create a white trash, horror-steeped spectacle literally soaked in fake blood (when they hit the stage). Following *Curse of the Psycho* (2005) and *Mark of the Psycho* (2010), this year brings the *Spawn of the Psycho*, an album that promises to amp up the intensity of everything that came before it, starting with an album cover featuring a pregnant Courtney Cruz (founder of LA's burlesque troupe Devil's Playground) naked and covered in blood. Opening with the poem "Boldly Stand" by The High Priest of the Church of Satan, Magus Peter H. Gilmore, the disc lets loose an all-night grindhouse sticky seat-a-thon of tracks such as "Go Die!!!," "Sanguinary" and "Kill, Baby, Kill!!!" As the press release says, "Imagine if Robert Rodriguez released the ultimate grindhouse movie, *Spawn of the Psycho* could very well be the soundtrack."

In celebration of the album's release this month, we asked frontman Jimmy Psycho to pick his top five exploitation movies.

## 1. SATAN'S SADISTS (1969)

"Psycho Charger watches a lot of biker movies, and this Al Adamson flick is our all-time fave — a balls-out, down-and-dirty piece of biker cinema...complete with violent, depraved bikers, gorgeous women, groovy dialogue and a pretty killer soundtrack. A real ruthless bike-o-rama!"

## 2. BLACULA (1972)

"This is one of Psycho Charger's fave movies of all time. We liked it so much, we wrote a song about it! It packs a real punch: a blaxploitation horror/vampire flick that's all wrapped up in the vibe of a 1970s TV crime drama. Pretty much hits on all cylinders. The slow-motion scene of the female vampire running down the hospital hallway is still scary as shit!"

## 3. ROLLING THUNDER (1977)

"A great revenge cult classic! The first shocking moment is when you realize that Tommy Lee Jones was actually young at one time! It's written by Paul Schrader, who also wrote *Taxi Driver*, so you know you're in for something good here. It's a movie so incredibly awesome that Quentin Tarantino named his distro company after it."

## 4. CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST (1980)

"There's not much that I can say here that hasn't already been said about this film. It's a documentary-style movie that was way ahead of its time. ... Banned in many places as people thought that the violence was real."

## 5. MANIAC (1980)

"Damn, we love this movie! Joe Spinell puts in a truly riveting performance as an incredibly disturbed man doing incredibly disturbing things. Holds up as one of the most graphic and disturbing slasher films of all time. Truly a grindhouse masterpiece!"

AARON VON LUPTON

about Evelyn Dick, who left the headless, limbless torso of her husband on the Niagara Escarpment (which is actually otherwise quite beautiful). Each of these crimes are detailed in this 7-inch's accompanying liner notes, laid out in distinct gutter punk chic. The music is definitely for a certain set (specifically, those clad in crusty denim with back patches), but anyone with a need for speedy, primal hardcore will dig the brutality. Okay Hamilton, you win this round. **AVL** ☼☼☼



## MISFITS EARTH A.D.: THE CVLT NATION SESSIONS

Various

CVLT NATION

The Misfits' impact on horror music — whether it's punk, hardcore, goth, psychobilly or metal — cannot be overstated, and that's why covering them can be tough. CVLT Nation gets it mostly right by releasing a free-to-download compilation that focuses entirely on the 'Fits' seminal hardcore blasterpiece, *Earth A.D.*, populating it with crust and thrashcore acts tailor-made to explode with the ferocity befitting of the ghouls' speedfest. Woes start things off with a sloppy, half-assed death metal spewing of "Earth A.D.," but thankfully Drug Lust picks up the slack by channeling its inner Meatmen on "Queen Wasp." We Are the Damned, Baptists and several others take worthy stabs at the album's raw punk classics, but the best comes last with "sigil grind demon-beat punk metal" practitioners Dislich (as the Disfits), killing both "Hellhound" and "Die Die My Darling." Demonomania still runs wild! **JS** ☼☼☼ 1/2



## CRADLE OF FILTH

Total Fucking Darkness

MORDBRIMM

This new double LP and digipack CD from Mordgrimm Records presents what is the most definitive snapshot of

date of Cradle of Filth's embryonic black/death metal history. Indeed, *Total Fucking Darkness* not only collects the original 1993 demo in its entirety, but this lushly packaged release (the limited edition of which will arrive in three separate 180 gram variants, complete with occult artwork and inserts from singer Dani Filth) also unearths a track, "Spattered in Faeces," from the band's aborted Goetia sessions. Initially designed to be Cradle's full-length debut, *Total Fucking Darkness* serves as an intriguing look back at the band's dirty, death metal approach in those days, compared to the gothic, sumptuous black metal sound they would eventually pioneer. The album is a dream come true for old school Cradle fans: a thoughtful and dense collection of rarities from one of black metal's most infamous outfits. **GP** ☼☼☼ 1/2



## VAINAJA

Kadotetut

SWART RECORDS

Vainaja follows in the tradition of grim and sombre Finnish metal, which includes the elegiac folk-metal of Amorphis, the bitter resignation of Sentenced's traditional metal and the self-explanatory "funeral doom" of Skepticism. Drawing upon from recently recovered documents, *Kadotetut* expands on local folklore to expose cultists operating within the ranks of a rural parish, their activities extending from clandestine ritual blasphemy to murder via premature burial before the practitioners were burnt alive on their own church altar. Vainaja continues its countrymen's proud tradition of darkness, complete with acoustic and spoken word passages intertwining with mostly plodding riffage and slow-and-low vocal eulogies to amplify the mournful atmosphere so key to the nation's death/doom heritage. Definitely not for everyone, but fans of the admittedly tiny subgenre are sure to enjoy this release from start to, erm... Finnish. **GT** ☼☼☼





## LORD WORM, SINGER OF BLACK METAL OUTFIT RAGE NUCLÉAIRE, LIVES UP TO HIS SKIN-CRAWLING MONIKER

BY  
NATALIE ZINA  
WALSCHOTS

### AGE NUCLÉAIRE VOCALIST LORD WORM DOESN'T JUST WORK WITHIN THE HORROR GENRE, HE LIVES IT.

Also known as Daniel Greening (above, centre) – the founding vocalist of Montreal technical death metal masters Cryptopsy – he's one of very few people who can talk about cannibalism with the attitude of "done it, been there, still have the scars."

"I've been known to slit my guts open, then hot wax is poured in, just for, you know, pain," he says. "Then it's plucked out and in go the tongues. As for the cannibalism: skin nodes, arm, the dry areas on the side of the foot, but don't get too deep because then it gets too hard to walk."

This profound commitment to exploring horror and extremity – or at least cultivating a chilling reputation – permeates every aspect of the metal vocalist and lyricist's creative work, including on Rage Nucléaire's second record, *Black Storm of Violence*.

Worm, who earned his name by eating live worms onstage, became involved with band after his final departure from Cryptopsy in 2007 (he left the band before and returned). He admits he felt constrained during his second stint with his former outfit, referring specifically to the 2005 record *Once Was Not*.

"When I came back, the album was pre-written, and meant to be a concept album," says Worm, who was given the album title and banned from making references to Satanism, using coarse language and indulging in other extremity. "That was the constraint I had to labour under – not quite a Sistine Chapel."

*Black Storm of Violence* (out now via the label Season of Mist) is a more traditionally collaborative effort, composed in a tiny studio. Worm is joined by Dark Rage on guitars, Alwater (formerly of Frozen Shadows) on bass and keyboard, with drummer Fredrik Widigs (of Marduk) contributing from Stockholm.

In Rage Nucléaire, Worm and company have traded the technically intense death metal sound that Cryptopsy favoured for a uniquely filthy, eerily intellectual take on black metal. The guitar tone is rancid: an acid-scoured, fire-blasted wreckage that brilliantly evokes the sounds of battle and carnage in "The Sino-American

Chainsaw War," while calling forth a wrenching misery on "Goddess of Filth." The record also showcases Worm's infernal versatility as a vocalist, from high-pitched, anguished shrieking to deep, monstrous bellows. There are moments where it's difficult to believe those sounds are being emitted from a human throat, rather than something terrible that has been conjured for the purpose.

The love that Worm and his bandmates have for horror saturates every aspect of the album, from the lyrics and composition to the samples and effects. Many of the sounds are homemade, but it also includes clips from films such as *Hellraiser: Bloodline* and *House of 1000 Corpses*. The heavy breathing on "Goddess of Filth," for example, was created with a Michael Myers mask.

"I put that on," recalls Worm, "and because the mask doesn't have a mouth – lips but no mouth slit – I put the microphone in the left eye hole, and that's how we got those sounds."

Worm believes that heavy metal and horror overlap intensely, not only in aesthetic choices, pushing boundaries and a commitment to intensity, but also in the way that a love for the genre and a passion for the work can sometimes permeate the quality of the final product, in the way that brilliant films exist alongside Ed Wood's oeuvre.

"You can feel the love," he says of horror films. "It's the love of the filmmaker for the craft that transcends the cheapness and badness, and it has that charm. How can we not love it?"

The album's promotional photos also employ a cinematic aesthetic, utilizing the makeup and effects of Montreal filmmaker and artist Rémy Couture, who became famous when his *Inner Depravity* short films attracted the attention of Interpol, as well as the Montreal police, who arrested him under the suspicion that the violence, makeup and effects in his films were actually real. (Worm describes Couture's involvement as "the natural choice.")

Despite Worm's dark proclivities, there is a curious warmth about him: a willingness to share intense experiences even at his own expense.

"I'm constantly vulnerable, and so I am constantly invulnerable," he shares. "I have my exoskeleton, but I know the chinks in it. ... You can't possibly enjoy other people's pain unless you enjoy your own flavour. It becomes a kind of sharing."





# PLAY DEAD



**NOW PLAYING** > WOLFENSTEIN: THE NEW ORDER, GO GO GHOST, FOREST RUN



## WOLFENSTEIN: THE NEW ORDER

PC, PS3, PS4, Xbox 360, Xbox One  
Bethesda Softworks

The year is 1946 and even though Hitler is dead, the Allies are about to be overthrown thanks to the machinations of General Wilhelm "Deathshead" Strasse and his elite army of high-tech Nazi killing machines. As Captain William "B.J." Blazkowicz, you're the best line of defense until a piece of shrapnel gets lodged in your skull, putting you in a coma for over a decade.

Waking up in the 1960s, the world has become a very different place; the Nazis have rampaged across the Earth and even the Moon! Your mission is to hook up with other freedom fighters and form a new resistance to defeat the evil juggernaut once and for all.

This is a gratuitous, old school shooter that's been amped to the max with the latest gaming technology. The gunplay is downright awesome and the developers haven't shied away from spurting blood and disintegrating heads. Your bullets, grenades, blades and lasers produce all manner of grisly carnage.

Previous *Wolfenstein* titles kept gameplay mostly confined to cramped castle corridors, but *The New Order* features vast open-ended arenas (including labour camps, prisons and moonscapes),



as well as trains and even a U-boat. Everything here is meticulously detailed and coupled with an understated soundtrack that only blares during boss battles.

Among the other welcome additions are a stealth system, which allows you to sneak up on bad guys, and the ability to unlock some passive new upgrades, such as increasing the amount of ammo you can carry after performing a certain number of kills. Even B.J. gets a

once-over, as we are finally able to find out what makes him tick via many inner dialogues.

Enemies run the gamut from regular soldiers to gigantic robo-tanks and cybernetically enhanced dogs that'll shred you to pieces. Lucky for you there are plenty of health and armour packs on every level. Be prepared for roughly ten hours of frenetic, pulse-pounding action that rarely lets up – and always remember that the only good Nazi is a dead one!

ANDREW LEE



**HEADSHOTS:** GREAT VOICEWORK, LOTS OF ACTION, FUN VITAPINITY  
**MISFIRES:** BOSSES ARE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO KILL, SKETCHY ENEMY AI



## GO GO GHOST

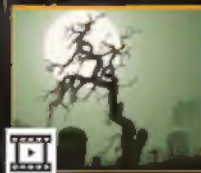
iPad, iPhone, iPod, Android  
DeNA Vancouver

If you like side-scrolling, coin-collecting-style games, yet have always been disappointed that the "horror" versions of these mainstays feel slapped together, meet *Go Go Ghost*. It's jam-packed with monsters, from the skeletal ghostie guy you play, to the creepy creatures you crush and/or avoid (depending on how spiky they are), to bosses like the boil-covered mutant rabbit you defeat by collecting ammo and avoiding projectiles.

Unlike games where you must stay alive as long as possible, here each stage has a predetermined length and a specific goal (collect coins, kill a certain number of monsters, etc.); you get bigger and better rewards for exceeding the goals. As you gain gold and gems, you can purchase a variety of power-ups and bonuses to help you successfully complete each phase and customize your playing style, by choosing the rewards most valuable to you (invincibility, more coins, etc.).

Like many free-to-play mobile games, there is an energy meter that runs out after a certain amount of failures and takes time to recharge, but consider this a reason not to die rather than a reason not to play. Be warned, though, *Go Go Ghost* is pretty much the definition of monstrously addictive side-scrolling fun.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



## FOREST RUN

iPad, iPhone, iPod  
Mehmet Uysal

For the most part, tablet games are becoming increasingly sophisticated and more visually striking. Then there's *Forest Run*, which bills itself as a "3D Runner Horror Game" yet feels like an early smartphone title rather than something hitting the app store in mid-2014.

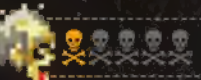
The premise is threadbare, the story non-existent and the gameplay beyond basic: run through a foggy forest while avoiding trees, rocks and large stone outcroppings to escape a mysterious *something*. The game controls your speed, so all you have to do is tilt your device back and forth to navigate obstacles, while listening to a soundtrack of panting breaths and wolf howls. There's nothing to collect and the scenery never changes. Also nothing ever catches you; death comes via a blood-red splash when you careen into a tree or rock.

Young gamers who have trouble managing tricky controls may have some fun with this, but anyone over the age of eight will likely be bored senseless in less time than it takes the app to download and install. Steer clear of this forest.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



**HEADSHOTS:** CREEPY CARTOONISH MONSTER ART, TRICKY LEVELS  
**MISFIRES:** ENERGY METER VERY SLOW TO RECHARGE



**HEADSHOTS:** EERIE COLOUR PALETTE, QUICK RESTARTS  
**MISFIRES:** NOT SCARY OR EXCITING, ADS POP UP OVER GAMEPLAY



# CLASSIC CUT

## THE KING IN YELLOW

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS ☠ 1895

While H.P. Lovecraft has become a household name far beyond the horror community, and the Cthulu mythos that he created remains one of the most influential, canonical narrative concepts in the genre, the work of his forerunner Robert W. Chambers remains much more obscure. Chambers had a deep influence on Lovecraft, particularly his macabre and romantic short story collection, *The King In Yellow*, which in turn was influenced by Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death," Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* and the work of Ambrose Bierce (from whom Chambers borrowed the names Carcosa and Hastur, the latter of which was also appropriated by Lovecraft). But *The King in Yellow* has worked its literary tentacles far deeper into the contemporary imagination than most would imagine.

The collection is defined by its extreme attention to structure, featuring a framing narrative based on allusions to additional fictional material in the form of a deadly play. The idea of a text that is somehow so evil that exposure to it results in madness or death is a trope that has emerged over and over again in *King's* wake: Lovecraft used it in relation to his own fictional *Necronomicon*; films such as *The Evil Dead* and *The Ninth Gate* have employed the device; and in John Carpenter used it in his *Masters of Horror* episode "Cigarette Burns," and in Hideo Nakata's adaptation of Koji Suzuki's novel *Ring*, the deadly piece of media became a film itself.

*The King in Yellow* is split into two distinct parts, a kind of narrative diptych, with the first four stories engaging directly with the imaginary *The King In Yellow* play from which the book draws its title. The last four are creepy, often grim romances all set in Paris. In the centre is a ghost story "The Demoiselle d'Ys" and a series of poems that serve as a kind of hinge between the halves of the book, easing the reader from one mode to the next.

The rich language and sense of creeping dread in Chambers' writing has much in common with other works of gothic literature; often, the horrifying or supernatural is only gestured towards, while concrete and physical details are described with exquisite precision. The stories themselves have a distinctly science-fiction-like quality that sets them apart; they often deal with the intersection of the scientific and the supernatural (as

in "The Mask," in which a sculptor develops a serum to change things – including living organisms – into marble), near-future dystopian visions (the twisted political drama in "The Repairer of Reputations") and time travel ("The Demoiselle d'Ys"). Throughout the stories in the collection, references to, and quotes from, the fictional play *The King In Yellow* work to evoke a feeling that powerful, unseen forces lurk just outside the periphery of the worlds that Chambers creates in his tales.

Like the *Necronomicon*, *The King in Yellow* earned a place as one of the pieces of imaginary literature in the Cthulu mythos, inspiring several attempts by other writers to create a full or partial text of the play, including versions by Thomas Ryng and Lin Carter. The role-playing games *Call of Cthulu* and *Arkham Horror* also make use of the tropes, places and setting developed by Chambers, and authors including Marion Zimmer Bradley, Stephen King, Robert A. Heinlein, Grant Morrison and Raymond Chandler have directly or indirectly alluded to the collection in their work. Several metal bands, including Anal Nathrakh, Ancient Rites and Root have referenced the book in their lyrics and liner notes, and The Dead Milkmen borrowed the title for the name of their ninth studio album.



The most recent and most popular incarnation of the symbols and mythology of *The King in Yellow* has been on the HBO original series *True Detective* (see p.37), which drew extensively on the collection for source material. At the end of the second episode, in the journal of a ritually murdered woman, Matthew McConaughey's character Rust Cohle comes across disturbing drawings and the words, "I closed my eyes and saw the King in Yellow moving through the forest." From this moment, the series transforms from intense police procedural to cosmic horror, and connections to a far deeper evil only intensify as symbols such as black stars and repeated references to the colour yellow in everything from crowns to apartment walls arise. With every step further into decadence, depravity and psychological degradation in the show, the influence of *The King In Yellow* grows stronger, ultimately not only renewing interest in the original text, but solidifying the power of Chambers' classic work.

NATALIE ZINA WALSCHOTS

